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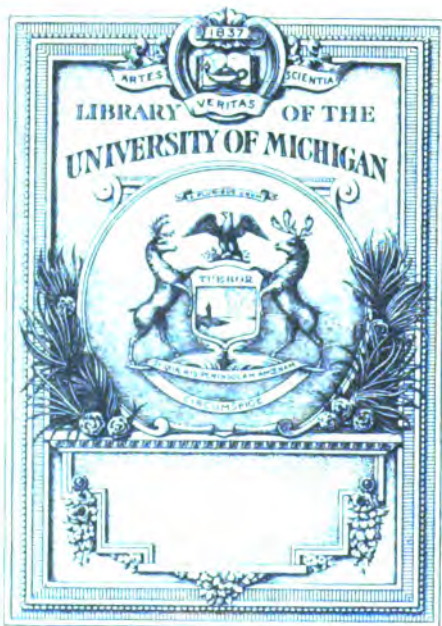
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**STEVENSON**



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**ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON**

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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RESEARCH REPORT

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# ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

## HOW TO KNOW HIM

*By*

RICHARD ASHLEY RICE

*Professor of English Literature at Smith College*

*With Portrait*

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**STEVENSON**



# STEVENSON

## CHAPTER I

### THE COMPANIONABLE AUTHOR

#### I

STEVENSON is one of the companionable authors. He has been able, in an unusual degree, to give himself out to his readers, to share with them his purposes, his tastes, his experience of life. For it is in the mutual appreciation of these things that congeniality between people usually begins, and it is in the stimulus, the suggestion, the criticism to be derived from them that companionship is always fostered. The best friends are they who share fully and imaginatively each other's purposes, tastes, and past experience. And if this is the gist of a man's relation to his fellows, it may also be the secret of his intimacy with his companionable books. In the case of Stevenson and his readers this seems to be especially full of meaning.

Doubtless there is a distinction between a man's favorite books and his most companionable author. Every man capable of literary friendship has, or may have, a few books peculiarly his *own*, in which

he feels himself dwelling with the characters or on a journey with them, discovering from them not only their ideas but his own, just as one does in the conversation of life, with surprise and satisfaction. But it is only the great books which are thus human, books with lifelong friends, books to be often revisited. Your companionable books are those you have reread. That is the first definition of them, and it corresponds to what might be said of your best friends, for are not the companionable books those which you begin to realize you will always be re-reading, much as you keep dropping in on your best friends? Such books, like friends, are rare; you can not often discover them just for the seeking, and, having suspected their kinship, you must cultivate them with all the sympathy and intelligence you possess in order to deserve the best they have to give in return.

Companionable books, in this sense, we have all known. There are, in another sense that we do not quite so often appreciate, companionable authors. And this, as I say, is a distinction not without a difference. The companionable author may or may not have written any of your two or three most admired books. He may or may not be one of the great figures in literature. Perhaps he is, in fact, a very humble one. He must be, however, the author of books you read in order to be with *him*. He must be a man of whose biography and letters you are a student, and about whom every scrap of information and gossip has come to have

a personal interest—a man whose mind you know, whose temper you have grown used to, whose character you love, because they are his. You know his faults, and you are his defender; you know his virtues, and you are his critic. He belongs to you. He may be centuries old and of towering fame, he may have died obscurely last week; but he is yours, your part of this world's genius.

The companionable author, whether great or small in intellectual stature, is of more value to you who possess him than any of his books. I had almost said, than any book. Especially does this appear to be true in the case of Robert Louis Stevenson, who has written no long sustained great work of art, but whose literary production as a whole makes him the fluent, easy, sympathetic, encouraging companion *par excellence*, whom to know, in his good and in his less good, is always a personal and companionable experience. ~~For if he has left~~ us no very great books, he has instead left us himself, and that more completely and confidently, and hence, to those who like him, more enjoyably, than perhaps any other modern writer. He lives as a part of everything he writes, naturally, without subtlety, though in many a different dress and pose for which his fancy and his genial egotism gave him the zest.

The genial egotist—that is his literary character. If you do not like him, you do not like his books. "*Le style c'est l'homme,*" and in Stevenson's case, it is, "*L'homme c'est tout.*" You may know easily

whether you like him; too easily some would say, who prefer more reserve, more subtlety, who find their truest delight in Henry James, who like their Thackeray the better for his long, fascinating game of hide-and-seek with the reader round the corners of the comedy, and Meredith for the smile of baffling irony that vaguely marks his presence on the scene. Stevenson is accessible and intimate. Not only does he exist bodily in one of the best biographies and in four surpassing volumes of letters, but also in nearly every romance, essay and tale which came from his pen. He had the autobiographic habit. It makes the warp and woof of his art. His chief motive seems to be to reintroduce himself and his history to the reader until he is on the personal footing of an old friend.

To do this without egotism is impossible. It requires the very essence and energy of an egotism that is ever fresh. But we do not misunderstand. Stevenson in his personal talk is not exploiting himself after the fashion of those notorieties who now so often "sell their lives" very dearly to the magazines. His constant gossip about himself, his ancestors, his plans, his morality, springs from a natural and social instinct. It rarely grows stale. It is something like the willingness to be confidential in Charles Lamb and something like the desire to surprise in Hazlitt. It is both frank and delicate, like the talk of those men.

Stevenson needs no introduction. His hat is always in his hand, and you see at once if his looks

are to your fancy. If they are, trust him; he will be glad to show you around. Have you a taste for old inns, for smugglers and pirates and all kinds of sea-dogs, for the wind in the rigging and the smell of oakum? Is your fancy haunted with strange islands, tropical forests, cargoes of champagne, coral reefs, and buried treasure? He will know how to do by you properly. Do you care for walking tours, roadside gossip, sleeping out under the stars, or a fire, a change of clothes, and a whiff of comfortable tobacco to help you think it all over again? Then Stevenson is your man. Or do you happen to feel that life is as humdrum as a kitchen stove and all the world made of dust and money, that you have forgotten how to play and that work is only a way of killing time? Perhaps Stevenson will put you right and be very agreeable about it too. Are you in danger of forgetting how it feels to be young or what is the fun of growing old; is your health dwindling and your courage not increasing to match the issue; does your wife appear unromantic and querulous about the future, and is she given to a lot of Grundyism, and you to other forms of specious morality, in short, are you both becoming as trite as two sticks? Stevenson is your doctor—of medicine and of philosophy. His medicine is thought and his philosophy laughter; and you are not worthy of your rightful share in him if you do not take them alternately in large doses. He will finally teach you to prescribe for yourself.

Now, of course, he will want to do most of the



correspond, the best of them, to the best of his hopes, we shall so arrange our discussion of their philosophy and their art that it may be illuminated by the facts and the hopes of his career. We shall see him first in certain essays and poems as a fanciful, playful child, living in his father's house in a world of his own, and developing the peculiarly youthful imagination that governs his maturest art. That his ambition to use this imagination in literature formed under his father's eyes directly counter to the interests of the family profession, determines the first act in the drama of his life. We shall see him next, in various books and sketches, having his way, making the seemingly irresponsible and vagabond experiments his heart was set on and proving that the splendid inheritance of nervous energy from his forebears could serve him well in a new kind of labor, in a new conflict. Out of this conflict between ill health and ambition, tempered by the fortune of his marriage, he makes his philosophy of life. It is a romantic philosophy, not a philosophy of success; and we shall see finally that both his long and cheerful search for health, and also the books he wrote meanwhile are its romantic illustration.

For while Stevenson was whimsical and full of experimental variety to the end, he was not capricious. He was one of the sanest of men. His career and his production are each consistent. His purposes grow steadily plainer and are in the end easily definable. He is that rare man whose doc-

trine accords with his experience whether announced before or after. He is that rare man who appears, in spite of jarring difficulties in life, to have seen it whole and to have made the most of it.

Let me briefly describe some of the general peculiarities that belong alike to this man and to his books.

In them both the inherent and personal quality is romance. What I mean here by romance is this: Stevenson was so fond of using his imagination about all matters, of "supposing," as he used to say, that to him nothing looked as it might to the ordinary person. Nothing appeared obvious, and until it struck his fancy in some peculiar light he did not care to think about it at all. This was part of his egotism, which was, in most respects, a poetic egotism. At times, it is true, this makes his style and his attitude only appear forced or strange; far oftener it makes him think and act freely and originally. For it is through a poetic imagination that he becomes individual. But his romantic independence, with its resulting criticism of the conventional world, was not in any sense unsocial. Though he rebelled against the accepted ideas of respectability, morals and religion, he is not a *rebel*. He is, like Addison, like Hazlitt, like Lamb, the genial, if somewhat satirical, critic of humanity. Like them he is first of all social; only you must take him as he is—and he insists on being taken, you can not ignore him—in his soft collar and old velvet jacket. His eccentricities, in fact, served him as points of contact with the world.

If they increased his feeling of self, they also helped him to get more action out of life; they prevented the stale from growing too stale, and called adventure from otherwise calm seas. Stevenson always remained peculiarly sensitive to life. His rough experience never made him callous. Hence his ultimate philosophy is marked by no detachment or aloofness from the world. His moral force of character and the chief thought of his serious writing is best described by the words *cheerful courage*. It comes from his own experience of life. It is intimate, not theoretic. All courage is not cheerful. Some of it is grim, stern, and unsocial, the courage of the man who takes the bit in the teeth or who bolsters up his spirit with zeal. There is a sense of humor in Stevenson's courage, a sense of proportion, which makes it suitable to conditions. It often assumes the form of banter or of bravado, when it does not need to rise to the heights; and it is always sane and sweet.

I know there is another side to this. For there are people who remember Stevenson chiefly as a nervous eccentric, an irritable invalid, rather offish in manner; or as a sort of flibbertigibbet and cleverling, a man who liked, for example, after sitting long perfectly quiet in a room full of people, suddenly to burst into meteoric flaming talk and wild gesticulation, leaving the impression of mere queer-ness and affectation. There are people in Edinburgh who still think of him as the lad who could not stick to his job, who worried his father to death

with queer doings, and gave away a lot of good hard-earned Scotch money to French ne'er-do-weels in Paris and Barbizon. Stevenson was eccentric. He had a temper. He was a sensitive and often irritable invalid. He was not very orderly in his way of living, and seemed to be largely incapable of taking decent precautions for the sake of his health. He liked now to magnify his troubles and now to make naught of them, as we all do in order to be martyrs or heroes in our fancy. He liked to dress queerly for the sake of the sensation it gave him to be outwardly different from other people, and then to take offense at those who could not see through his disguise. He had a wonderful gift for exaggeration, for becoming fascinated with his own flights of fancy and with the words of his mouth. He never presented exactly a standard of excellence, and you can say little about him that you must not soon contradict. Yet such a statement does not invalidate the essential consistency of the man, if you know him.

*fact*  
✓

The popular idea of Stevenson is the true one. I have no new picture to offer. He is the Stevenson of his own books, and by them we shall see him.

## CHAPTER II

### CHILD'S PLAY

#### I

**A**MONG the characteristic amusements of Stevenson was his game of fancy about what he called his antenatal life. Most of us think of our ancestors a few generations back only a little less impersonally than of the presidents of the United States, but Stevenson always felt that he was bound in and with his forebears. Some part of their adventures still stirred in his blood like physical memories; and this young man, so delicate of limb, so often confined to the house for weeks at a time in the bad Edinburgh weather, used to encourage in himself the notion that it had not been always thus, that parts of him had seen life, and that, on the northern seas with his grandfather, the builder of the Bell Rock Light, with his great uncles in the Caribbean, with military ancestors still more remote, he had played a greater rôle.

So, whatever is the real significance of heredity in forming the temper and genius of men, Robert Louis himself liked to be a strict evolutionist. On his father's side was a line of devout, Calvinistic, iron men of action, adventurers and fighters, and,

in his father and grandfather, followers of that hardest and most fascinating of adventurous callings, lighthouse building. This was the family profession. The Stevensons had built the most famous lights on the Scotch coast, Bell Rock and Skerryvore. Thomas Stevenson, as his father before him, was sole engineer to the Northern Board of Lights; and though Louis was too delicate in health when the time came to take up this work in earnest, he nevertheless had in his nerves the grim determination it would have required. He was to use it to battle against even more terrible elements than sea and wind. From these men he liked to think he had his love of far adventure, his intense love of the sea and of the open road. His immediate relationship with his father was not, however, always a happy one. His father, a whimsical and extremely imaginative man with a peculiar gift for bizarre conversation, was of a stern, moody, melancholic disposition. He was too much like his son on one side, too violently different on another, ever to understand him well. Louis's mother, a brilliant and cheerful woman, with a zest for society and an unusual literary taste, came of a family of Scotch divines; and her son's peculiar streak of gay morality, the piquant optimism that tinges all his essays and the philosophy of nearly all his heroes of fiction, is the fancied inheritance from her. "About the very cradle of the Scot there goes a hum of metaphysical divinity," writes Stevenson in one of his moralizings on this aspect of his character.

It was at his clergyman grandfather's house, Colinton Manse, a few miles from Edinburgh, that his childhood was largely passed; and his ancestral adventures on both sides of the family, described in that "memory and portrait" which he calls "The Manse," will serve to introduce us, after his own fanciful fashion, to Stevenson himself.

"Now I often wonder what I have inherited from this old minister. I must suppose, indeed, that he was fond of preaching sermons, and so am I, though I never heard it maintained that either of us loved to hear them. He sought health in his youth in the Isle of Wight, and I have sought it in both hemispheres; but whereas he found and kept it, I am still on the quest. He was a great lover of Shakespeare, whom he read aloud, I have been told, with taste; well, I love my Shakespeare also, and am persuaded I can read him well, though I own I never have been told so. He made embroidery, designing his own patterns; and in that kind of work I never made anything but a kettle-holder in Berlin wool and an odd garter of knitting, which was as black as the chimney before I had done with it. He loved port, and nuts and porter; and so do I, but they agreed better with my grandfather, which seems to me a breach of contract. He had chalk-stones in his fingers; and these, in good time, I may possibly inherit, but I would much rather have inherited his noble presence. Try as I please, I cannot join myself on with the reverend doctor; and all the while, no

doubt, and even as I write the phrase, he moves in my blood and whispers words to me, and sits efficient in the very knot and center of my being. In his garden, as I played there, I learned the love of mills—or had I an ancestor a miller?—and a kindness for the neighborhood of graves, as homely things not without their poetry—or had I an ancestor a sexton? But what of the garden where he played himself?—for that, too, was a scene of my education. Some part of me played there in the eighteenth century, and ran races under the green avenue at Pilrig; some part of me trudged up Leith Walk, which was still a country place, and sat on the High School benches, and was thrashed, perhaps, by Doctor Adam. The house where I spent my youth was not yet thought upon; but we made holiday parties among the cornfields on its site, and ate strawberries and cream near by at a gardener's. All this I had forgotten, only my grandfather remembered and once reminded me. I have forgotten, too, how we grew up, and took orders, and went to our first Ayrshire parish, and fell in love with and married a daughter of Burns's Doctor Smith—'Smith opens out his cauld harangues.' I have forgotten, but I was there all the same, and heard stories of Burns at first hand.

"And there is a thing stranger than all that; for this *homunculus* or part-man of mine that walked about the eighteenth century with Doctor Balfour in his youth, was in the way of meeting other *homunculos* or part-men, in the persons of my



other ancestors. These were of a lower order, and doubtless we looked down upon them duly. But as I went to college with Doctor Balfour, I may have seen the lamp and oil man taking down the shutters from his shop beside the Tron;—we may have had a rabbit-hutch or a bookshelf made for us by a certain carpenter in I know not what wynd of the old, smoky city; or, upon some holiday excursion, we may have looked into the windows of a cottage in a flower-garden and seen a certain weaver plying his shuttle. And these were all kinsmen of mine upon the other side; and from the eyes of the lamp and oil man, one-half of my unborn father and one-quarter of myself, looked out upon us as we went by to college. Nothing of all this would cross the mind of the young student, as he posted up the Bridges with trim, stockinged legs, in that city of cocked hats and good Scotch, still unadulterated. It would not cross his mind that he should have a daughter; and the lamp and oil man, just then beginning, by a not unnatural metastasis, to bloom into a light-house engineer, should have a grandson; and that these two, in the fulness of time, should wed; and some portion of that student himself should survive yet a year or two longer in the person of their child.

“But our ancestral adventures are beyond even the arithmetic of fancy; and it is the chief recommendation of long pedigrees that we can follow backward the careers of our *homunculi* and be reminded of our antenatal lives. Our conscious years

are but a moment in the history of the elements that build us. Are you a bank clerk, and do you live at Peckham? It was not always so. And though to-day I am only a man of letters, either tradition errs or I was present when there landed at St. Andrews a French barber-surgeon, to tend the health and the beard of the great Cardinal Beaton; I have shaken a spear in the Debatable Land and shouted the slogan of the Elliots; I was present when a skipper, plying from Dundee, smuggled Jacobites to France after the '15; I was in a West India merchant's office, perhaps next door to Bailie Nichol Jarvie's, and managed the business of a plantation in St. Kitt's; I was with my engineer-grandfather (the son-in-law of the lamp and oil man) when he sailed north about Scotland on the famous cruise that gave us the *Pirate* and the *Lord of the Isles*; I was with him, too, on the Bell Rock, in the fog, when the *Smeaton* had drifted from her moorings, and the Aberdeen men, pick in hand, had seized upon the only boats, and he must stoop and lap sea-water before his tongue could utter audible words; and once more with him when the Bell Rock beacon took a 'thrawe,' and his workmen fled into the tower, then nearly finished, and he sat unmoved reading in his Bible—or affecting to read—till one after another slunk back with confusion of countenance to their engineer. Yes, parts of me have seen life, and met adventures, and sometimes met them well. And away in the still cloudier past, the threads that make me up can be traced by fancy into the bosoms

of thousands and millions of ascendants; Picts who rallied round Macbeth and the old (and highly preferable) system of descent by females, fleërs from before the legions of Agricola, marchers in Pannonian morasses, star-gazers on Chaldean plateaus; and, furthest of all, what face is this that fancy can see peering through the disparted branches? What sleeper in green tree-tops, what muncher of nuts, concludes my pedigree? Probably arboreal in his habits. . . .

"And I know not which is the more strange; that I should carry about with me some fibres of my minister-grandfather; or that in him, as he sat in his cool study, grave, reverend, contented gentleman, there was an aboriginal frisking of the blood that was not his; tree-top memories; like undeveloped negatives, lay dormant in his mind; tree-top instincts awoke and were trod down; and Probably Arboreal (scarce to be distinguished from a monkey) gambolled and chattered in the brain of the old divine."—"The Manse," *Memories and Portraits*.

## II

His energies and tastes perhaps thus forming in innumerable antenatal lives, Stevenson was born from out the past of romantic adventure and metaphysical divinity, in the romantic and metaphysical city of Edinburgh, in 1850. All his life he was to romanticize and moralize his experience. In fact to do both at once, to make morality romantic and ro-

mance into a moral, was to be his chief originality as an author. So his playful fancy is here very significant.

But the more immediate reality of his inheritance appears in a weak chest and tendency to colds which he inherited from his mother, and which during childhood caused him to be taken continually to the shore at North Berwick or to Colinton for the better air. After moving twice in the city before he was eight years old, the family settled at 17 Heriot Row, on high ground, with a view from the back windows of the house over the Water of Leith. Stevenson was so delicate that, much of the time, even when he had begun to go to school, he was a housed boy; and not until after two winters spent in Mentone, when he was thirteen and fourteen, does the struggle against sickness appear to have abated, and then only for a few years.

Though this was largely the fault of the Scotch climate, which he hated, he was to the end of his life, so much of which he lived in foreign lands, a thorough Scot. He is among those famous Scots, like Burns and Sir Walter, who have definitely increased the fund of patriotism in the whole world by their romantic feeling for their own land. For perhaps no race loves its racial and tribal home so much as does his. "Scotland," an old man said to me once, after boasting of the vigorous climate of his country, "is a hard mother to her sons. That is why we are all so great!" She proved a hard mother to Stevenson; and I think she had much to

do with making him great, in spite of her terrible weather and sea fogs which nearly killed him, and which finally drove him forever from her shores. No country has had a greater hold on the imagination of its people or has been more stimulating to effort.

"A Scottish child hears much of shipwreck, outlying iron skerries, pitiless breakers, and great sea-lights; much of heathery mountains, wild clans, and hunted Covenanters. Breaths come to him in song of the distant Cheviots and the ring of foraying hoofs. He glories in his hard-fisted forefathers, of the iron girdle and the handful of oatmeal, who rode so swiftly and lived so sparsely on their raids. Poverty, ill-luck, enterprise, and constant resolution are the fibres of the legend of his country's history. The heroes and kings of Scotland have been tragically fated; the most marking incidents in Scottish history—Flodden, Darien, or the Forty-five—were still either failures or defeats; and the fall of Wallace and the repeated reverses of the Bruce combine with the very smallness of the country to teach rather a moral than a material criterion for life. Britain is altogether small, the mere tap-root of her extended empire; Scotland, again, which alone the Scottish boy adopts in his imagination, is but a little part of that, and avowedly cold, sterile and unpopulous. It is not so for nothing."—"The Foreigner at Home," *Memories and Portraits*.

Stevenson's childhood is a story of a rather unsuccessful struggle against ill health with a resulting growth of imaginative sensitiveness as the boy, deprived of physical activity, turned his energy inward; for nervous energy Stevenson had to a remarkable degree. Moreover he had a sort of toughness, born perhaps of this very combat with disease, and a buoyancy of disposition that dispelled mental lassitude in the midst of illness. One of Stevenson's chief characteristics, and most important in understanding his philosophy, was developed early. As a result of the bad Scotch weather and his confinement to the house, he learned to play in his mind as perhaps no perfectly healthy child ever learns. He was an only child, and much of his play was by himself. For this reason, perhaps, his war games were more elaborate, more logically continued. His ship on the stairs, the horseman galloping by on windy nights who haunted his imagination, the "shadow march," his hunter's camp behind the sofa, about all of which you may read in *A Child's Garden of Verses*, were matters of more vivid importance to him than they could have been to most children who had constant outdoor activities to fill their days with reality and their nights with sleep.

"All round the house is the jet-black night;  
It stares through the window-pane;  
It crawls in the corners, hiding from the light,  
And it moves with the moving flame.

"Now my little heart goes a-beating like a drum,  
With the breath of the Bogie in my hair;  
And all round the candle the crooked shadows come,  
And go marching along up the stair.

"The shadow of the balusters, the shadow of the  
lamp,  
The shadow of the child that goes to bed—  
All the wicked shadows coming, tramp, tramp,  
tramp,  
With the black night overhead."

—"Shadow March," *A Child's Garden of Verses*.

And behind the sofa, approached by the forest track  
all in the dark along the wall—

"There, in the night, where none can spy,  
All in my hunter's camp I lie,  
And play at books that I have read  
Till it is time to go to bed.

"These are the hills, these are the woods,  
These are my starry solitudes;  
And there the river by whose brink  
The roaring lions come to drink.

"I see the others far away  
As if in firelit camp they lay,  
And I, like to an Indian scout,  
Around their party prowled about.

"So when my nurse comes in for me,  
Home I return across the sea,  
And go to bed with backward looks  
At my dear land of Story-books."

—"The Land of Story-Books," *A Child's Garden  
of Verses*.

He has told of all this in a paper quoted by Mr. Balfour in his *Life of Stevenson*; and in many autobiographical essays he has described how he was thus always at play, living in "a purely visionary state." No part of his life Stevenson was fonder of returning to and moralizing about than the play hours and story-books of childhood. They colored with cheerfulness his whole after experience; and a child who did not know how to invent, to play with zest in his own mind, he always regarded as a pitiful and rather unhappy sort of creature. His wife tells of his watching the games of some children at Bournemouth, and of his disgust at a generation that had forgotten how to play. "I see," he exclaimed, "the approaching decline of England!" But, no doubt, as his wife observes, it requires something like genius to play as Stevenson played. It requires, at least, a special nervous energy which is the chief part of genius, and also it requires that rare quality of memory that sharpens rather than dulls interest, that makes memory a source of invention, of ability to vary and to continue. Obviously many children have played nearly as well as Stevenson. But have they continued it? Conventional sports usually supersede the games of fancy, and except for an occasional return during some "pastoral" affair, the spirit of make-believe dies out and is forgotten when we are no more than A. B.'s.



## III

Stevenson's distinction, and the frequent distinction of genius, is shown in the fact that he did not forget, that a very small part of his accomplishment went to waste. Being a thoroughgoing evolutionist in regard to his own personality, he himself traces a close connection between his mature play, the play of his productive genius, and child's play. He and his cousin Bob (R. A. M. Stevenson) grew up from the stage when they ate buttercups in the back yard as shipwrecked sailors, or spent whole days in drawing maps to help them find their adventurous way across imaginary continents to the stage when they wrote out these tales for a magazine they "edited." There were in fact many of these magazines. Louis's interest in writing began early. Whether or not his dreaming one night at the age of four that he "heard the noise of pens writing," is a serious indication of his bent, he at least made his *début* at the age of six by writing a History of Moses, dictated to his mother on five successive Sunday evenings, for which he received a prize from his uncle. The next year he composed a History of Joseph, and altogether in the period of boyhood some dozen or so tales, most of them, however, not Biblical but of the "Skelt" variety. "The Adventures of Jan van Steen," in *The Schoolboy's Magazine*, other adventures in other periodicals famous for a day, must have been pretty racy reading if we can judge by the samples in Mr. Balfour's *Life*.

"Skeltdom," to which Stevenson pays the homage of genius in "A Penny Plain," was a land of glamorous melodrama which so took hold of the boy's imagination that it is now impossible to say how much of *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, and other such tales we may not owe to it. In Skeltdom, for a penny, the sickly boy was a hero of romance, and if he soon passed on to the higher and more spacious fields of glory in Dumas he already bore some honors with him.

"I have, at different times, possessed *Aladdin*, *The Red Rover*, *The Blind Boy*, *The Old Oak Chest*, *The Wood Dæmon*, *Jack Sheppard*, *The Miller and His Men*, *Der Freischütz*, *The Smuggler*, *The Forest of Bondy*, *Robin Hood*, *The Waterman*, *Richard I*, *My Poll and My Partner Joe*, *The Inchcape Bell* (imperfect), and *Three-Fingered Jack*, *the Terror of Jamaica*; and I have assisted others in the illumination of *The Maid of the Inn* and *The Battle of Waterloo*. In this roll-call of stirring names you read the evidences of a happy childhood." These pieces of literature he bought for a penny "plain." "I cannot deny," he continues, "that joy attended the illumination; nor can I quite forgive that child who, wilfully foregoing pleasure, stoops to 'twopence coloured.' With crimson lake (hark to the sound of it—crimson lake!—the horns of elfland are not richer on the ear)—with crimson lake and Prussian blue a certain purple is to be compounded which, for cloaks especially, Titian

could not equal. The latter colour with gamboge, a hated name although an exquisite pigment, supplied a green of such a savory greenness that to-day my heart regrets it. Nor can I recall without a tender weakness the very aspect of the water where I dipped my brush. Yes, there was pleasure in the painting. But when all was painted, it is needless to deny it, all was spoiled."—"A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured," *Memories and Portraits*.

The psychology of "Child's Play" Stevenson has described in an essay of that title. It is art for art's sake; that is the gist of it. In Stevenson's case the imagination of the man, the useful and romantic imagination, is clearly suggested in what he has told us of his infancy. "An author must live in a book as a child in a game oblivious to the world." In "A Penny Plain," "A Novel of Dumas's," "A Gossip on Romance," "Child's Play," "A Chapter on Dreams," "Rosa Quo Locorum," and here and there casually in many other essays, exists the testimony of the author to this relationship of his early sensitiveness of imagination to his later purposes as an artist. Fascinated by the sound of the language, by the reading aloud of his mother and his nurse, by the recitations of his Aunt Jane, associating, for example, all such phrases as "Death's dark vale" and "pastures green," which he read in a graphic version of the Psalms, with definite places in Edinburgh, he grew early to have that temperament for words which is one of the determining features of

his style. He remembers vividly his first great interest in *Rob Roy*, and records that such phrases as "the worthy Doctor Lightfoot"—"mistrysted with a bogle"—"a wheen green trash"—"Jenny, lass, I think I ha'e her"—were henceforth part of his dialect. It is also in "*Rosa Quo Locorum*" that he tells about his discovery of reading. He had been playing all day, and toward evening being sent on an errand to the village, he took along a book of fairy tales. Going down through a firwood in the magnificent sunset light and reading as he walked, he experienced a sudden great shock of pleasure the recollection of which never left him and for the rest of his life touched the mere process of exploring a book with romance.

The remarkable thing is not that Stevenson had these experiences, which I believe are the common experiences of imaginative children, but that Stevenson continued all his life to be thus sensitive, and especially that he kept up a *sensational* memory of the past. He says somewhere that he is one of the few people who really remembers his past. The more one knows about men of artistic genius, the more one realizes that this kind of memory is an economic condition of such genius, and often an explanation of it. In the minds of the artists there are few waste sensations. In the productions of genius everything has counted. Writing at the end of his life in Samoa, he gives us a picture of his childhood in Edinburgh, which in this connection it will pay the reader to look at. It is quoted at the

end of the third chapter in Balfour's *Life*. It is not a description of Edinburgh; it is in reality a picture of his mind, of his vivid memory of "inarticulate but profound impressions," as he walked with his nurse "gaping on the universe."

#### IV

There was, as might be expected, another side to this unusual sensitiveness of imagination. Very early he developed his extraordinary capacity for suffering—suffering which was, however, positive and creative. It was part of Stevenson's equipment for close contact with life. In his grave illnesses as a child, the feverish hours of waiting for dawn which he describes to us are the beginnings of a kind of imaginative introspection that later marks his genius. The author of *The Merry Men*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, "Thrawn Janet," "The Isle of Voices," and of those peculiarly imagined terror-scenes in *The Master*, "The Beach of Falesá," "The Pavilion on the Links," is the dreamer of strange childish nightmares, and later on, of sleep-fantasies, that so often appear to have a reasoned moral. In his "Chapter on Dreams," Stevenson has described the effects of illness on his early imagination, effects which seem to have been aggravated by the stories of his beloved nurse, Alison Cunningham. "Cummy," unaware how far a child's imagination even in health will carry the dogmas of Calvinistic hell-fire theology, used to give him the benefit of her

own cheerful religious views, and Louis did not dare to go to sleep for fear of waking in the flames of the underworld. In the morning he would be feverish and ill.

And yet Stevenson would not have given up these things. Which of us, in fact, does not look back on such experiences as the better and romantic part of life? Anything in order to have felt! Reality is only what we experience now. It is wholly circumscribed. The past, like the future, is a dream, and capable of infinite expansion. It transcends fact or truth and becomes a widening field of adventure.

"The past," Stevenson argued, "is all of one texture—whether feigned or suffered." One recollection may be vivid, another may be dull, but which is true and which merely a dream there is "not one hair to prove." What does our past then amount to? Would we not be just the same Smith or Robinson were it truth or dream? A metaphysician might argue it away entirely. But though fancy and fact, a few years gone, are so much alike as to be indistinguishable, imagine us robbed of these "air-painted pictures," this romance of memory which we call our past—how circumscribed would be our outlook! Without a romantic picture of our past in the back of our brains, could there be any romantic vision of the future before our eyes? Dreams and memories—they extend the lives of those who cultivate them beyond the lives of their more practical minded neighbors and, as I say, make a field of ever fresh experience.

Stevenson, the evolutionist, definitely connects this kind of dreaming with the growth of his genius; and for any theory of genius, as energy created by subconscious activity, which is a theory that at least accounts for the rapid processes and apparently miraculous intuitions of certain men of genius, dreaming might well furnish some minor evidence. There is, I believe, a set of Indian mystics who never sleep, at least not the ordinary dark sleep of normal men; they have trained their brains to continue at night certain practical and profitable subconscious processes, and the condition of the body meanwhile they call "white sleep." Stevenson's imagination was to some extent given its cast by similar experiments.

Stevenson says that he was ever an ardent and uncomfortable dreamer. While he was a student in Edinburgh, he explains in this "Chapter on Dreams," he began to dream a story from night to night; and so persistent was this subconscious streak that it made a kind of double life for him and began to produce a mild form of mental confusion. In some alarm he visited a physician, who easily dispelled the trouble by "a simple draught." But in this incident one can see the future imaginer of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; and though Stevenson says here that he never had another such experience as this, he records later that *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was itself a dream, and that "Olalla" was mostly a dream. In this same "Chapter on

Dreams" he goes on to say that he had long been in the custom of putting himself to sleep with tales, as his father before him, "tales where a thread might be dropped, or one adventure quitted for another, on fancy's least suggestion."

Stevenson calls the sprites of imagination who guide a man's fancies during sleep or waking "the Little People." At first they played upon their stage like children, rather irresponsibly, not like drilled actors. But presently he began to turn this amusement of dreaming and story-telling to account; he began to write and sell his tales. This made a new business for the Little People. The stories had now to be "trimmed and pared," and to fit with the laws of life. But the Little People understood the change as well as he. When he began to dream it was not an aimless adventure he embarked on, but something that could be turned to account; and after he had, so to speak, given over the direction of the affair, the Little People continued it. When his bank-account ran low, when he set to stirring his brains for a plot, the Little People at once began to experiment upon their midnight stage. Who are the Little People, the sprites of imagination? Stevenson says they are beyond doubt near connections of the dreamer. Perhaps they are creations of financial worry! No, they are even closer to him than this. They are creations of his training and perhaps have more talent than he. "One thing is beyond doubt, they can tell him a story piece by



piece, like a serial, and keep him all the while in ignorance of where they aim."

These passages are a humorous commentary both on much that is charming and not a little that is futile in Stevenson's literary method. The Little People were not always the best hands to help him arrange a long and complicated matter. They often played him tricks and deserted him. If *Treasure Island*, *The Merry Men*, "The Isle of Voices," are the works of the Little People, *The Black Arrow* is a result of their desertion, "Olalla" is one of their complete failures, and one suspects that the blind alleys in nearly all Stevenson's longer books are places of their perverse invention. Still, his continued reliance on them rather than on any more prosaic creatures has given us those fancies which we most delight in. Their faults and their virtues are complementary.

From this description of the sources, out of his childhood, of some traits of Stevenson's peculiar genius, it must not be thought that he was growing up merely a fantastic dreamer and player of games. The experiences here described colored his imagination and to a great extent determined his taste, but they did not distort his mind. They added to the charm and originality of his creative fancy all through his life. As we shall see, Stevenson was one of those fortunate men who contrive to make all their experience count, and to utilize it thoroughly. He grew up to the age of school and college full of the zest for experiment, and his char-

acter might be described at this time, as well as the quality of his genius, by adding that where he did not come by knowledge naturally he secured it by sheer invention.

## CHAPTER III

### LITERATURE AND THE FAMILY PROFESSION

#### I

**O**UTWARDLY, Stevenson's life from 1859, when he began a rather irregular schooling, to 1875, when, after giving up all idea of following the family profession, he had studied law and had been admitted to the bar, was in accordance with the ideas of a practical, hard-headed Scotch father, who believed in fitting every man for a definite career. As a boy Stevenson attended three different schools in Edinburgh and read under various tutors. He had been once, for a month, at Hamburg, near Frankfurt; two winters with his mother on the Italian Riviera at Mentone, in 1862 and 1863; and the two springs of 1864 and 1865 at Torquay. In Scotland he spent his frequent vacations at Colinton, North Berwick, or with his father on lighthouse service. Entering Edinburgh University in 1867, he began a regular course of scientific studies calculated to prepare him for engineering. In 1871 he read before the Royal Scottish Society of Arts a paper on "A New Form of Intermittent Light for

Light Houses." Then, twelve days later, he told his father that he did not wish to continue in scientific work. What he wished to do was what he had been working at in earnest all the time his normal education had proceeded. He wished to be a writer.

If we examine those essays which contain Stevenson's memories of school and college days it is evident that his chief interest was all along to learn the art of writing, his ambition to publish. These essays may be divided into three sets: a few dealing with his experience in and about Edinburgh, such as "Lantern Bearers," "Old Mortality," "The Character of Dogs," "Pastoral," "An Old Scotch Gardener," "A Winter's Walk"; a few more showing what his interest in the family profession really was, such as "A Family of Engineers," "Memoirs of an Islet," "The Education of an Engineer"; and finally several essays describing or analyzing his private ambition and his methods of learning to write, which I shall discuss in the next chapters.

In the first set you perceive the artist's strong and natural delight in all his experiences, with many evidences of what Stevenson called his "consistent egotism." You will see that the zest for play and make-believe described in "Lantern Bearers," that wonderful defense of the romantic purposelessness of youth, widens into an appreciation of all serious artistic material as the only true material for play. Play is making new experiences out of the usual, thinking about things imaginatively, enlarging them into new values, getting more out of life than mere

money's worth. It seems, as I look at the set of Stevenson's works on the shelf behind me and realize what they stand for, that every vivid experience which Stevenson had at this age must have so occupied his imagination afterward, have furnished him so much material for play, that he was forced to explain it to others with somewhat the same delight as any of us explains the games of our childhood twenty years later. And there is about these essays much the same combination of spontaneity and artificiality that one finds in the games of youth. For playing with an idea is the secret or open motive of many of Stevenson's writings. Play, mere play, sets his mind free; it involves all his resources.

Upon the function of play in life and in art you may read very learned disquisitions, like the *Æsthetic Letters* of Schiller, but the gist of the whole thing, or at least its happiest symbol, is perhaps Stevenson's account of his bull's-eye lantern. It may well be taken as a symbol for the fundamental thing in his own character—the early development of which we have just noticed—his artistic ability to play. The smoky, reeking, tin contrivances which the small boys of Colinton carried under their top-coats on autumn nights, solely for the "joy" of the thing, serves him late in life for an emblem of his whole poetic purpose. Art is not opposed to utility, and play is not opposed to utility. But neither is to be judged by it. The poetry of life is eminently useful, but utility is neither its purpose nor its sanction. "Who misses the joy misses all." This is as

true of life as of poetry, which ought to be the essence of life. Utility is not the essence of life. Realism is not the essence of art. Of each the essence lies in imaginative beauty.

This is the vital and poetic strain in Stevenson's mind. For whatever else he was or failed to be, he was fundamentally poetic. In this essay on the art of the lantern he is directing his criticism against the school of realists; but when all is said, his complaint of them is not that they fail to touch the joy of romance, but that they failed to touch realism with poetry. This is what Stevenson means by his doctrine of play. Many have dealt more sharply than he with reality, but few have *played* with it so well. Few have so frequently called in the Little People to bear a hand.

For an example, and a right homely one, let Stevenson once feel the glamour of Scotch moors and the Scotchman's intense love of them, let him decide that the sheep business is the typical Scotch pursuit, let him catch the image of the old shepherd, John Todd, to give the idea form and make it live, and he has the outline of the game. With the aid of the Little People he can write his essay called "Pastoral." What he saw many a realist has seen, and perhaps has felt what he felt; we may ourselves come from a race of shepherds and know the whole business from A to Z; but are John Todd and his sheep matters to our hand? No, the Little People are lacking, or the chances are that we at once put them to rout. Not so with Stevenson. He

invites them in and what they bring him is a heightened vividness which is beyond realism.

"We have not so far to climb to come to shepherds," he says at the end of this essay; "and it may be I had one for an ascendant who has largely moulded me. But yet I think I owe my taste for that hillside business rather to the art and interest of John Todd. He it was that made it live for me, as the artist can make all things live. It was through him the simple strategy of massing sheep upon a snowy evening, with its attendant scampering of earnest, shaggy aides-de-camp, was an affair that I never wearied of seeing, and that I never weary of recalling to mind: the shadow of the night darkening on the hills, inscrutable black dots of snow-shower moving here and there like night already come, huddles of yellow sheep and dartings of black dogs upon the snow, a bitter air that took you by the throat, unearthly harpings of the wind along the moors; and for centerpiece to all these features and influences, John winding up the brae, keeping his captain's eye upon all sides, and breaking, ever and again, into a spasm of bellowing that seemed to make the evening bleaker. It is thus that I still see him in my mind's eye, perched on a hump of the declivity not far from Halkerside, his staff in airy flourish, his great voice taking hold upon the hills and echoing terror to the lowlands; I, meanwhile, standing somewhat back, until the fit should

be over, and, with a pinch of snuff, my friend relapse into his easy, even conversion."—"Pastoral," *Memories and Portraits*.

This was a sensation to start the fancy of youth—one of the unforgettable commonplaces for those who have seen it.

In these essays Stevenson has the methods of the romantic poet. He is expressing his own feelings and his own specific experience. He is part of the scene, never impersonal. He gives shape to an idea not by working his way through it systematically, but by tossing it about in his game of phrases and images till you have seen what it is like in his mind. In "Old Mortality," his own experience, as nearly always, serves as a starting point; so that this little philosophy for greensick youth is not a set topic, a writer's theme, but something springing naturally from Stevenson's interest in his own character. The fun of reading the essay is like the fun of personal talk. It continues, by a series of suggestions, not by a prearranged plan pointing to a foreseen goal. At the end you have not the satisfaction of arriving; only the pleasure of the author's companionship and of the incidents on the way. This is the spirit of play as distinguished from that of business. The spirit of business is to arrive, to finish, to settle things—a spirit in which most writing is undertaken and completed. The spirit of play is the charm of lyric poetry, and Stevenson's essays about his



early experiences have both in their origin and method much that is fundamentally poetic because they are so intimate and so personal.

## II

Let me ask the reader a question: Have you thought what it is like to be a poet? Why are you not a poet? You are thoroughly interested in your own experiences; you are very likely egotistical enough. Why does your egotism not inspire you? Why does the world not stir it for you until it brims over? You have sat in graveyards, and you have seen sheep herded. Yet you are not Thomas Gray nor Robert Louis Stevenson. Is it feelings that you lack, and words? Or is it the energy to make a play out of what impressions you receive? "It is said," remarks Stevenson, "that a poet has died young in the breast of the most stolid." There are of course thousands of sensitive mortals with nerves responding to all impressions, who are the constant reservoirs of poetic feeling without being able to care for the forms of play that it suggests. They try to make these impressions vivid neither in conversation, nor in music, nor in pictures, nor in writing. But if you will begin to do any one of these things and carry it beyond what may be called an inventory of fact, you have some idea of the energy required for artistic play.

Such energy was Stevenson's; and so far as we are immediately concerned here, this spirit of play

explains the turn of his life during school and college. It explains his motives in choosing a career. He has, at first, no purpose as a writer except this purpose to play, to use his imagination about his various experiences and impressions. Neither does he seem to have special or favorite subject-matter which he takes to for its own sake. A thing interests him chiefly because he had a part in it. Hence, to have experiences of all sorts, to know life in varying detail, to watch John Todd herd his sheep or to go down in a diving-bell, is more significant to him than to become himself a professional sheep-farmer or a trained engineer. To the poet the significant thing in life is the sequence of his own changing impressions; it could not be the routine of a business.

That such instinctive considerations were at the bottom of Stevenson's choice of literature as a career, instead of engineering or law, is obvious from the character of his writings which deal with the period of his youth, and nowhere more so than in those topics connected with the family profession. Thomas Stevenson, as you learn in his son's tribute, was devoted to his career of engineer as a service to the nation. He never, for example, took out a patent on any of his inventions, regarding them as the property of the nation. The profession had come down in the family from his grandfather, Thomas Smith, first engineer to the Board of Northern Lights, and Thomas Stevenson was the fifth member of the family to be engaged in it. There-

fore to discover that his son Louis's youthful interest in the profession was really a romantic and literary interest, or only an exhibition of good will, instead of serious scientific purpose, was a bitter experience to him. Louis had been with him on various cruises; he had shown a level head, though not very steady nerves, in various difficult situations; he had done fairly well in the scientific courses at the university. The family still hoped that his frail health might improve. But Louis in his twenty-first year had made up his mind not to experiment further with an alien taste and a doubtful practicality. Thomas Stevenson resigned himself to the situation. He stipulated, however, that Louis should be fitted for the law in order to have a profession to fall back on, if literature, as he thoroughly expected, proved an inadequate support. Louis could not refuse acquiescence in this; and, as it turned out, though he never practised law, he was also never properly self-supporting by means of his pen till his father's death. His health, however, would have made law or literature equally impossible had he desired to follow it in Scotland.

In those essays called "The Coast of Fife," "The Education of an Engineer," "Memoirs of an Islet," "A Family of Engineers," you may readily perceive what kind of appeal the family profession had for Stevenson. It attracted him in its aspects of adventure and danger and as the romantic inheritance of the family. It attracted him as literary material. But it had no practical hold on him. Neither had

he any practical aptitude for it, only a certain theoretical liking.

Concerning a visit to Anstruther, where he went in July, 1868, to glean engineering experience from watching his father's workmen build a breakwater, he has left a record in the essay called "The Education of an Engineer." He confesses frankly that the details of construction interested him solely as material for a romance. Such things as rubble, polished ashlar, pierres perdues, the string course, were merely expansions of his vocabulary and went along with the sunshine, the sea-air, the waves, "the green glimmer of the divers' helmets far below," into his romantic dream, not into his practical mind. His real labors were not on the breakwater with the masons, but after dinner in his chamber where he poured forth "literature"—*Voces Fidelium* and dramatic monologues in verse "at a terrific speed, spurred on by intimations of early death and immortality."

Another engineering experience the next month at Wick seems to have consisted chiefly in a descent in a diving-bell, which was the real source of this document in romanticism about which I have just spoken. Its title ("The Education of an Engineer") should really be "The Education of a Writer." Another memory of these days begins as follows:

"Those who try to be artists use, time after time, the matter of their recollections, setting and resetting little coloured memories of men and scenes,

rigging up (it may be) some especial friend in the attire of a buccaneer, and decreeing armies to maneuver, or murder to be done, on the playground of their youth. But the memories are a fairy gift which cannot be worn out in using." This paper entitled "Memoirs of an Islet" goes on to say that these places where he went to observe his father's operations proved useful to him for the scenery and the characters of his tales. "There is another isle in my collection, the memory of which besieges me. I put a whole family there, in one of my tales; and later on, threw upon its shores, and condemned to several days of rain and shell-fish on its tumbled boulders, the hero of another. The ink is not yet faded; the sound of the sentences is still in my mind's ear; and I am under a spell to write of that island again."—"Memoirs of an Islet," *Memories and Portraits*.

In many things at this period Stevenson thus found his true interest in life to be heretical and, from his father's point of view, wasteful. But for genius everything counts; which, by the way, is also an explanation of why genius is rare. Truancy, idleness, dreaming, often as much as labor or attention to a definite business in hand, play their part; for, in the mind of genius, the unity of things is more comprehensive than in the mind of practicality. What seems waste turns out or is made to be economy. What seems like a serious set-back finally appears as a decisive step in advance. Life, for

the strong and original men, is nearly always thus consistent. In their wills are few false intentions, and in their environment few blind alleys.

In 1871, when Stevenson declared against the family profession, he knew that his real education had all along been different from that planned by his father. His real education had led him to a complete faith in his desire to be a writer and to the belief that his subject-matter would be only his own experience with the world. As we see it now, his life was reasonable; for what he became is precisely what one would expect of a man whose mind had been formed in boyhood in such peculiar fashion as has been described. Genius is logical; the surprise would have been R. L. S. as a successful civil engineer.

### III

There are, in this matter of Stevenson's determination to be a writer in opposition to his father's plans and wishes, further circumstances which color his whole life, and therefore greatly affect the character of his literary production. It is a matter he gave much thought to later on. One can not read far in Stevenson without being struck by his frequent choice of the divergent views of father and son, of age and youth, both for analysis in an essay and for motive in a story. In *Virginibus Puerisque*, "Crabbed Age and Youth," and here and there throughout his papers, he is pointing out the

characteristic attitudes of the older and younger generations. Youth is full of romance, experiment, socialism, vagabondage, flaunting energy, passing brilliances; age is full of the enjoyment of safe knowledge. This is the gist of his doctrine repeated over and over. The father and son motive was to form the backbone of *Weir of Hermiston*, where it is heavy and tragic in significance; it was to be lightly presented in *The Wrecker*, very dully in "The Misadventures of John Nicholson," and very trivially in "The Story of a Lie." But all these cases, and several others, reflect something of Stevenson's own attitude.

His relationship with his father is a central fact in his career, and to see Stevenson clearly we must see the rather vague, wildish youth and the serious, definite man together in contrast. "Imagine," says Stevenson somewhere, "a young man who shall have grown up in an old and rigid circle, following by-gone fashions and taught to distrust his own fresh instincts." Against the solid dark-browed figure of Thomas Stevenson, with the dignity of his position, his inheritance and personal accomplishment, Louis appears all through his school and college days a good deal of the flibbertigibbet, a fascinating young witch of a boy, a wild and truant stripling full of ingenious practical jokes, and again a strange, awkward, yet tunefully voiced and gently mannered, poet, who flashes up into fiery seriousness about religion or socialism, and who always vibrates with an impermanent nervous energy. But this energy,

which expressed him then, was to grow later into a strong intellectual force. This is a thing the eyes of few parents can foresee, especially if they wish to educate the safe side of their child's character. Or, it may be, that realizing instinctively the importance of the other side, they believe that will strengthen itself all the more soundly for a little opposition. Stevenson spent his youth—and what boy of imagination has not?—under the darkening, yet kindly, eye of his father's counsel. The sternness of Thomas Stevenson's character corresponded with the sternness of the family profession; and the romantic element in Louis's view of it no doubt seemed trivial to the older man. To his father he often appeared, as he doubtless was, flippant and prone to exaggerate his own conceit. Later on this same flippancy is not quite outgrown, but it gets a tang of genial truth and becomes Stevenson's characteristic form of wit. To his father, as to so many of the citizens of Edinburgh, he was full of affectations and poses. Later on, as in the case of so many men of genius, these things appear normal to his character, expressions of a personality which strives to feel life as completely as possible, which is a widely inclusive personality. To his father and his teachers he appeared negligent of nearly all his set tasks, and his confessed truancy at college flaunted itself in the face of a dignified faculty. Yet his idleness, as it turned out, was perhaps the most serious matter in his education, and the fact that his sincerity and earnestness lay, as



clearly as elsewhere, in those very things his elders looked askance at, undoubtedly gave a touch of paradox to his whole character.

He has made his apology in all these essays we have mentioned, for no one preached more honestly and humorously what he practised; and in one essay especially, "An Apology for Idlers," he goes to the bottom of this matter. It is a retrospect through life to the original problem of the schoolboy.

"Extreme *busyness*, whether at school or college, kirk or market, is a symptom of deficient vitality; and a faculty for idleness implies a catholic appetite and a strong sense of personal identity. There is a sort of dead-alive, hackneyed people about, who are scarcely conscious of living except in the exercise of some conventional occupation. Bring these fellows into the country, or set them aboard ship, and you will see how they pine for their desk or their study. They have no curiosity; they cannot give themselves over to random provocations; they do not take pleasure in the exercise of their faculties for its own sake; and unless Necessity lays about them with a stick, they will even stand still. It is no good speaking to such folk; they *cannot* be idle, their nature is not generous enough; and they pass those hours in a sort of coma which are not dedicated to furious moiling in the gold-mill. When they do not require to go to the office, when they are not hungry and have no mind to drink, the whole breathing world is a blank to them. If they have

to wait an hour or so for a train, they fall into a stupid trance with their eyes open. To see them, you would suppose there was nothing to look at and no one to speak with; you would imagine they were paralyzed or alienated; and yet very possibly they are hard workers in their own way, and have good eyesight for a flaw in a deed or a turn of the market. They have been to school and college, but all the time they had their eye on the medal; they have gone about in the world and mixed with clever people, but all the time they were thinking of their own affairs. As if a man's soul were not too small to begin with, they have dwarfed and narrowed theirs by a life of all work and no play; until here they are forty, with a listless attention, a mind vacant of all material of amusement, and not one thought to rub against another, while they wait for the train. Before he was breeched he might have clambered on the boxes; when he was twenty he would have stared at the girls; but now the pipe is smoked out, the snuffbox is empty, and my gentleman sits bolt upright upon a bench, with lamentable eyes. This does not appeal to me as being Success in Life.

"But it is not only the person himself who suffers from his busy habits, but his wife and children, his friends and relations, and down to the very people he sits with in a railway carriage or an omnibus. Perpetual devotion to what a man calls his business is only to be sustained by perpetual neglect of many other things. And it is not by any means certain

that a man's business is the most important thing he has to do."—"An Apology for Idlers," *Virginibus Puerisque*.

At the time this was written there was a good deal more here which was paradoxical and daring than is now apparent. We have come to see that, though Stevenson's point of view is perhaps a trifle too picturesque, it is none the less sound; and though I have heard it seriously argued that this essay is flippant and artificial and unsafe to be put into the hands of young men, as undermining persistence and fortifying impulse, it is a defense of that real side of life so often obscured by the ambitions of Vanity Fair. Stevenson is talking about the ultimate things, the things which romantic youth sees and moneyed age loses sight of. If he must needs accompany his doctrine with a little flourish of bravery, which was a part of his character and a part of his gift of youth, it does not invalidate his doctrine; and if one really knows Stevenson this manner is never flippancy, but only another proof of his sincerity.

#### IV

In this connection—for it will help us to understand him better here—it is interesting to look at the youth as he appeared during his school and college days. In the pages of Mr. Baildon's study of Stevenson is a glimpse at this time which ought to

be especially remarked, for it is of the Stevenson who most closely corresponds to the genius of these essays.

"Stevenson calls himself 'ugly' in his student days, but I think that is a term that never at any time fitted him. Certainly to him as a boy about fourteen (with the creed which he propounded to me, that at sixteen one was a man) it would not apply. In body Stevenson was assuredly badly set up. His limbs were long and lean and spidery, and his chest flat, so as almost to suggest some malnutrition, such sharp angles and corners did his joints make under his clothes. But in face this was belied. His brow was oval and full, over soft brown eyes, that seemed already to have drunk the sunlight under Southern vines. The whole face had a tendency to an oval Madonna-like type. But about the mouth and in the mirthful, mocking light of the eyes there lingered ever a ready Autolycus roguery, that rather suggested the sly Hermes masquerading as a mortal. Yet the eyes were always genial, however gaily the lights danced in them; but about the mouth there was something tricky and mocking, as of a spirit that already peeped behind the scenes of Life's pageant and more than guessed its unrealities."

He had little grace of body. He was unspeakably thin, flat-chested, with no promise of filling out as he matured. His body and his hands expressed nothing so much as weakness and limpness, and he

carried himself in a way to accentuate this impression. But his face was not of the same aspect. There was a liveliness about his mouth and eyes and a geniality that centered the attention there. His voice, vibrating, always enthusiastic, spoke of an energy of mind that made up for the feebleness of his body. When his friend, Mrs. Jenkin, first saw him she described "a slender, brown, long-haired lad, with great dark eyes, a brilliant smile, and a gentle deprecating bend of the head." He was then eighteen.

From all accounts Stevenson at once impressed his acquaintances, not as a man who was working to be his father's son, but as an artist, the cousin of Bob Stevenson, the painter and Bohemian, and as a poet, a vagabond, anything, in short, except a young man growing up to live behind a desk. From the accounts of Henley, whom he soon met in an Edinburgh hospital; of Sidney Colvin, whom he met in the summer vacation of 1873 at his cousin's house in Suffolk; of Edmund Gosse, who was presented to him at the Saville Club in London, and from many other sources, one gets much the same impression—delicacy and wildness combined, a weak body dignified through power of fascinating by unique and lively energy. This is the infinitely variable, fluent youth whom his father wished to mold in a certain definite fashion. It was not to be. Such force as Stevenson possessed contains the germs of spontaneous combustion. Life for him was a pageant of adventure, a series of social ex-

periments, a game to be played as well as possible, and a thousand other things, alike in being anything except a routine.

To this point of view about life Stevenson was further inclined by his health; and here lies one of the secret explanations of his character. Bad health is usually deadening, invalidism usually reduces people to a humdrum *régime* and timorous selfishness. Or, in the case of a boy ambitious for a fine body, it often proves a steadying agency that conduces to a regular and effective life which in the end conquers disease. Again, it is often simply upsetting, producing rashness and whimsical irregular habits, accompanied by a silly optimism or by a fitful morbidity. It does not often have the effect which it had on Stevenson. His uncertain health, making necessary many weeks indoors in the midst of school, as well as a series of irregular vacations in the open air, had undoubtedly increased his innate love of vagabondage. But this was a positive, a creative thing, not just an incapacity for steady work. Then, though it is also true that Stevenson was rash and whimsical, not liking to take care of himself except in extremity, and that he exposed himself to danger, now foolishly and now heroically, all his life, yet this was not often the result of mere moodiness, or of a vain desire to live like other people unconcerned for their health; it sprang rather from the sane fear which creative genius has of systematically enslaving or checking the spirit.

The nature of youthful artistic genius drives it

forth from any routine or restraints which it has not itself established, because it wishes to use all its motives, powers, experiences, to dismiss nothing, to make everything count. Only thus, apparently, can it discover what is wasteful and what is useful. For things which are seemingly, and by all the accounts of an older generation, extravagant, are discovered to be the indispensables; and what had been indispensable is now found to be worn hollow. Stevenson, reacting against the restraint which his health, his parents, and his professional training were imposing on him, became, while he was beginning to taste life, rather indulgent and fantastic—especially as viewed against the solidly successful figure of his father. He was the hero of exploits in *Jink* and *Libbelism*, to be read of in his own words in Mr. Balfour's *Life*. He wore a black shirt for the sake of distinction and difference; he talked atheism at the Speculative Society; and stood in another dangerously secret and less dignified organization, the L. J. R., for the abolition of the House of Lords and like "treasons." He records in *Virginibus Puerisque* that he was a red-hot socialist and does not regret it. Indeed he counsels us to regret none of our youthful vagaries, which are, perhaps, the beginning of liveness instead of deadness in us. We should reach sanity and maturity the richer for discarded opinions. Youth must have speculative wisdom in addition to knowledge, and that is to be got only by coming down through hard experience from pinnacles of dreamy ambi-

tion to real life; it is not to be had from real life alone; one must have looked down on that and up toward heaven. "To know what you like is the beginning of wisdom and of old age. Youth is wholly experimental"—a remark in which you have the cast of his mind at this time, as well as his criticism of it, a remark made in the spirit of genial banter and wise levity which is his rare quality. Stevenson was one of those men who do not grow old and whose wisdom itself remains youthful and experimental, maintaining as consistently the recurrent point of view of youth as does Doctor Johnson's wisdom maintain the established, and sometimes stale, verdict of age. With Johnsonian elegance, Stevenson has said, "All sorts of allowances are made for the illusions of youth, and none, or almost none, for the disenchantments of age." Was Samuel Johnson ever wiser than that?

The *beginnings* of the logical power which produced the essays of *Virginibus Puerisque* may very well have been, however, rather disconcerting. To a father they may have all looked a little like rebellion.

It is safe to say that the breach, afterward so completely healed, which yet during part of Stevenson's college days, kept father and son apart, came chiefly from Thomas Stevenson's failure to appreciate Louis's real seriousness. He saw in the episodes of *Libbelism* and *Jink* only the player of pranks, in the truant only the truant, in the constitution of the L. J. R., which he happened to discover



one day, only a dangerous irreligious tendency. He failed to see what the boy's imaginative play, so long continued, had become. To him it looked like serious folly—that part of it which was not, at best, “playing at home with paper like a child.” He did not then understand the spirit of his son's protest :

“Say not of me that weakly I declined  
The labours of my sires, and fled the sea,  
The towers we founded and the lamps we lit,  
To play at home with paper like a child.”

## V

But playing at home with paper was a great part of Stevenson's purpose in life. In his essay on “A College Magazine,” he tells us that all through boyhood and youth he was known and pointed out for the pattern of an idler; yet he was always busy on his own private end, which was learning to write. And to this end was his experience and experiment to count, not consciously all of it, but, as genius manages the thing, instinctively. What Stevenson refers to in this essay is his end of mastering the technique of the craft, and this was a thoroughly conscious end. To begin with, countless exercises, “monkey tricks” he calls them, in imitation of the poets and essayists, attempts at dramatic dialogues, “gouty-footed lyrics,” essays “in the style of the *Book of Snobs*,” “abortive novels” and other “ventriloquial efforts” were the earnest amusement of

his idleness. Later on, when he began to originate ideas of his own important enough to absorb his whole attention, this method was of course abandoned; and he continued to learn his craft, to the end of his life, as every artist learns it, originally, in terms of his own feelings and experience. In view, however, of Stevenson's facility, without which he could not have hoped, in his variable health, to have produced many of his books, we must take seriously what he says here of this method of the "sedulous ape." As a method for the beginner, it has been brilliantly condemned by various authorities. Mr. John Jay Chapman, in an essay which I recommend to the reader, finds in it the source of all the faults of Stevenson's literary art.<sup>1</sup> How far I believe this judgment to be true will be more apparent from a following chapter.<sup>2</sup> But it should be said here that obviously Stevenson's method is not *the* way to learn to write, if by writing we mean the whole of literary art. It is the way Stevenson learned technique, and Stevenson was a mannered and naturally eccentric person who, at this early period before he saw his own ideas growing steadily under his eye, enjoyed playing with tones, much as the young painter enjoys certain combinations of color in the pictures he copies. These practise exercises may have given him a conception of style as something separate from his perception of the subject, which is, I believe, a confusing no-

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<sup>1</sup> *Emerson and Other Essays*: "Robert Louis Stevenson."

<sup>2</sup> See especially pp. 87-91 and pp. 95-101.

tion. They may have increased the itch for composition without increasing the fund of materials to compose. But can any one say that they have dulled the distinction which he would otherwise have attained as a writer? Is there anything in Stevenson's character as we know it which shows that for him this youthful method was an injurious affectation? On the contrary, it was merely part of his normal enthusiasm, his temperament, for literature. It is, in the connection in which we speak of it here, proof of the seriousness and persistence of his resolve to be a writer at last, after engineering and law were done with. And especially it is a proof of his conviction of original power. For no effort which does not spring from a sense of original power, which depends on the imitative spirit, could have persisted, as did Stevenson's, in the face of illness and discouragement.

To one following the evolution of his character, this method of his, which was also the method, you will recall, of men as different in temper as Benjamin Franklin and John Keats, seems a normal and effective way of learning to write. It supplies the youth, whose experience does not yet sufficiently correspond to his fancy, with materials and forms that may both stimulate and satisfy him. To write entirely out of his own limited experience demands a form and a simplicity which is beyond his power; to write entirely out of his fancies and dreams demands an experience in life which he has not yet had. This is not a para-

dox. It is the observation of every teacher of writing. Reading the great men and writing in the light of their methods was, for Stevenson, a bringing of the two parts of his nature, his experience and his fancy, into closer relationship. And it may safely be asserted that only an imaginative and original youth will see the essential quality of style in the great ones in such a way that it will occur to him to imitate them. We should remember also that it is a part of the egotism, rather than the humility of authors, that they delight to explain the origins of their craftsmanship, and, in the attribution of their final skill to practical, uninspired, laborious methods, we should not mistake them. Anthony Trollope was prouder of his ability to stick at his desk and write so many words an hour by the clock than to conceive and complete the plot of his whole novel. Shelley juggled long with the words of his "Skylark" before they at all corresponded to those profuse strains of unpremeditated art. Poe has dissected his poem, "The Raven," in a way to rob it, for the literal minded, of its last atom of inspiration. And I presume if it were known that Mr. Robert Herrick wrote *The Common Lot* in university examination books, a chapter to a book, it would convince some persons of my profession that that novel smacks of the blue pencil. Method is, after all, not the interesting thing about art. Any one who has seen the blowers of Venetian glass knows that both the simplest and finest-spun fantasies can be created with an old iron tube and pair

of tongs. It is part of Stevenson's genial egotism that he explained a good deal about his apprenticeship, and about how he came to write this and that—how he began *Treasure Island* by drawing a map of it, and how he conjured up the idea of *The Master of Ballantrae* from having once thought of the title years before during a night spent in the village of Ballantrae. Such testimony as to his means hardly invalidates his results.

Stevenson entered on his career—so vague to others, so promising to himself—in the face of opposition. He appears never to have regretted his choice, nor the opposition. Seventeen years later, just after his father had died, and Stevenson, having come to America, was feeling the full tide of fame, he wrote for *Scribner's Magazine* a "Letter to a Young Gentleman Who Proposes to Embrace the Career of Art." This young gentleman is Stevenson himself seventeen years back, still in the experimental stage, knowing as yet not just what he seeks, thinking it perhaps to be beauty or pleasure, when it is actually but "to verify his own existence and taste the variety of human fate." With wisdom born of trials such as few men undergo, yet with the fullest youthful sympathy, Stevenson advises the young man who once he was. Had he a right to embrace the career of art? Was the appeal merely that of escape from the cut-and-dried professions, and did it correspond chiefly to an impatience with the honest trades? If so, it should not have been regarded. It was a temptation, not a vocation. He tells the

young man that when his father so fiercely and so properly discouraged his ambition, he was probably recalling a similar temptation in his own experience. "For the temptation is perhaps nearly as common as the vocation is rare." But was this the case with that young man? Was he not able from the first to pursue his own ends with conviction, and without success, without ever asking himself that discouraging and fatal question, Is it worth doing? Did he not recognize in himself a decisive taste which only sharpened with habit and practise? These are the tests of the choice. And after seventeen years the proof of the career is not money and applause, says the elder R. L. S., though he had at last received his share; it is the pleasure of laboring in a craft to which the whole matter of one's life contributes, and which opens a way to his tastes, his loves, his hatreds, and his convictions.

His father's character had been expressed in granite. Stevenson's was to have another permanence, an *ære perennius* in another medium. And his father lived long enough to recognize that his son was also a master of craftsmanship.

## CHAPTER IV

### ORDERED SOUTH

#### I

**T**HE plan for Stevenson's career, on graduating from the university in 1871, was that he should study law in order to safeguard the future, and that he should, at the same time, pursue his literary adventures and training. Though neither part of this scheme then seemed to interfere gravely with the other, there can be little doubt that it imposed a nervous strain which precipitated the breakdown of his health in 1873.

The two previous years had been full of what was for him exciting experience. He had discovered Herbert Spencer and Walt Whitman, and had made a determination, seriously disturbing in such a family as Thomas Stevenson's, to become a free-thinker in religious and ethical matters. His resulting quarrels with his parents led him more than ever to cultivate certain friends who were, in those days, both solacing and over-stimulating. "It is the merit and preservation of friendship that it takes place on a level higher than the actual characters of the parties would seem to warrant," says Stevenson, quoting Thoreau. His friendships with his cousin,

"Talking Bob" Stevenson, and with Charles Baxter, whom he regarded as the most brilliant conversationalist he ever knew, were a constant exhilaration. Charles Baxter's long and invaluable sympathy is expressed by the fact that at the time of Stevenson's death he was on his way to Samoa for a visit. Then there was James Ferrier, and Sir Walter Simpson, with the latter of whom he made the Inland Voyage and many other expeditions; and especially there were Colvin and Mrs. Sitwell, who did more than any other people in bringing him out of his mood of despair and in reestablishing him with his parents. These friendships, which remained always an absorbing interest with Stevenson, for no man ever kept his friends more intimately in spite of isolating disease and of absence, encouraged him to constant literary experiment. He wished to prove himself. Their good-natured banter over his egotism and wildly imaginative talk, their sympathy, their admiration, were all of a mixture, I imagine, to drive such a youth beyond the wise limits of effort.

His earliest productions reflect a state of mental tension, of over-anxiety to write something, anything. They are not works of his genius. They are random productions of a state of bad health, when he was possessed by, rather than himself possessing, an ambition to fulfil what he felt to be his promise; they are *tours de force*, not productions of the natural overflow and outflow of his mind. During these two years he wrote much that was never



to see the light, but also several articles, such as the essay on "Roads," the travel scenes in *The Lakes*, Buckinghamshire, Galloway, which were printed later. Of the essay on "Roads" he wrote to his mother that he felt he had there said well several things which are very difficult to say at all. This essay he had just sent to *The Portfolio*, when he learned in London, in October, 1873, how serious the condition of his health had become.

During these two years he had nominally been reading law in a firm of writers to the signet in Edinburgh. He had passed the preliminary examinations for the Scottish bar in November, 1872. The previous summer vacation he had spent with Sir Walter Simpson in Frankfurt and the Black Forest. This was the first time he had crossed the Channel since his thirteenth year. His parents joined him at the end of August. They appear to have been very critical as to the way he was employing his leisure; and the return to Edinburgh brought fresh complications with his father. In February his father unfortunately found the draft of the constitution of the L. J. R., which, as I have said, was some sort of rather scandalous compact between Stevenson, Baxter and other Edinburgh youths. The nature of it has never been divulged; but the document convinced the elder man of the truth of his suspicions regarding what he thought to be his son's perverted tendencies, and there was a terrible scene.

After this for some time, indeed till Stevenson's

return from Mentone, things did not greatly improve. He grew nervously sick; and the month of August, spent at his cousin's, Mrs. Babington's, in Suffolk, while bringing him the new friendships with Mrs. Sitwell and Sidney Colvin, who were also Mrs. Babington's guests, was too exciting to have been a rest-cure. To Mrs. Sitwell he addressed for several years his most intimate confidences about his ambitions and about his troubles. She was that very important and never soon forgotten person in the history of youth, the first complete confidante.

With her encouragement and counsel, and under the criticism of her strong personality, he threshed his ideas. From his letters, full of confession, full of egotism, it is easy to see that she was for him the friend whom every man must have at that age, and should have all his life, the woman by the light of whose nature he sees through the confusion of his own thoughts and morals. Later in life she is the bright memory of those days when fate was not yet darkened by the shadow of exile. His last letter, written to her a few months before his death in Samoa, is the pitiful tribute to this relationship. Sidney Colvin, then a young man of twenty-eight, just appointed Professor of Art at Cambridge, a colleague of Professor Babington, became Stevenson's most trusted friend, and finally his literary executor. It is interesting to note that Colvin (afterward Sir Sidney) married Mrs. Sitwell in 1903, after Stevenson's death. This summer house-party seems to have been full of satisfactions and

enthusiasms. Stevenson made the impression of a charmingly eccentric youth, with those immature extravagances that are part of the economy of future resourcefulness.

Stevenson had returned to Swanston Cottage, his father's country house near Edinburgh, at the end of August and had shortly fallen ill. To aggravate his nervous condition on recovery, the theological arguments with his father once more disrupted the household. He writes to Baxter that he has broken his parents' hearts, but does not believe in lying in such matters, even to preserve peace. Largely, therefore, to avoid the constant irritation at home, and also because he was anxious to be at the literary center, he determined to read law in London. There was, perhaps, the ultimate prospect of being called to the English bar instead of the Scottish. On arriving in London, in October, 1873, his condition was seen by his friends to be alarming. The physician consulted, Doctor Andrew Clark, discovered a threatening of tuberculosis and a state of nervous exhaustion grave enough to warrant ordering Stevenson to spend the winter on the Riviera. His mother came from Edinburgh to see him off, and he reached Mentone by way of Avignon on November twelfth.

## II

Stevenson's essay, "Ordered South," is the truthful description of the mood through which he passed

during this shock and crisis in his life. The theme of cheerful courage which forms the background of his argument, the optimist's challenge to fate and the flourish of bravery with which he encourages himself and the reader, and many of the best-loved traits of his clear, courageous reasoning, are fully exemplified here. They presuppose, however, moods of worry, confusion, even of despair; and the indications of this are in his letters home. For nobody, I venture to say, comes to the expression of such reasoning about life as there is in "Ordered South" without having reasoned futilely or without having lived in the dark of his own mind, even preferring, for a while, to live there.

On his journey Stevenson began to revive at Avignon, where the color of the South drew his vision outward. To leave London and Paris in their gray November fog for the sharp brilliance, the yellow and white lights and the black shadows of the Provençal city, is to turn from the subjective to the objective. Stevenson at first felt, as he wrote to Mrs. Sitwell, that he had left his soul behind, that he could not enjoy and yet was not unhappy. At Mentone he was "placid and inert." In the essay he describes the change from negative to positive moods. He tells how the invalid learns to recognize his moods and seeks to encourage the most valuable; how one must therefore compromise somewhat with the most prudent advice in order to let the soul expand and to enjoy life sufficiently to keep a reasonably fresh view of it.

As a thorough romanticist Stevenson distrusted all his life what he calls "cowardly and prudential proverbs." The duty of acting naturally in the face of catastrophe, of noting that the sky is blue and that one still has an appetite for roast beef, this is the invalid's heroism, and may well be any man's. It is living rather than life that counts. On many a page of future essays and stories, Stevenson was to preach this doctrine, a very old one, but never newer than in his mouth and as the expression of his character. The great duty of man in the midst of uncertainty is *normal cheerfulness*. This is the text of "Aes Triplex," of the fable of "The Sinking Ship," of "A Christmas Sermon," of "Pan's Pipes," of "Pulvis et Umbra." It is the unobtrusive theme of all his essays of travel, "The Amateur Emigrant," "Across the Plains," "The Silverado Squatters," "In the South Seas," which make together the epical record of a Cheerful Traveler. It lends the chief grace to many of his stories, especially "Providence and the Guitar," and "The Treasure of Franchard."

The theme of these chapters of philosophy and experience is the theme of Stevenson's own recurrent problem—how to live superior to the inevitable instability of his own fortunes, how to live, not with daring complacency, but with earnestness, on the thin crust of the world and even on the rim of the crater. Feeling always the precariousness of his lot, and at the same time having so keen a

sense for the realities and enjoyments of existence, Stevenson grew to see the values of life calmly and sharply. He learned to look on the one hand into an abyss without fear, and on the other toward the solid ground without regret. Always he is asking us, from his vantage point, for our definition of life, and begging us to make it bravely, to touch it with poetry and humor, to defend it from pathos and sentimentality. What is this thing in which we are so bound up, with which we are so in love, from which we tremble to part, and which the whole effort of civilization strives to preserve? The wisdom of Job, or of Walt Whitman, all literature and all philosophy, is but an attempt to answer the question. But the only answer is the life of a man. The only permanent answer is concrete. Abstractly, life can be defined as *a permanent possibility of sensation*. That is the result of abstract wisdom. But for what sort of man has that answer ever had a meaning? Who is in love with mere plant-like existence? Now, life is, first of all and last of all, living. This is the comprehensive and concrete account of it—myriad experience, not to be summed up by any philosophical abstraction. For ever-desirous and ever-curious man life is not to be reduced to the aspect of “a permanent possibility.” It always remains something more precious, more like the divine gift with the breath of immortality in it. “The noise of the mallet and chisel is scarcely quenched, the trumpets are hardly done blowing,

when, trailing with him clouds of glory, this happy-starred, full-blooded spirit shoots into the spiritual land." Whom the gods love die young, for they are those who can drink from the cup of experience and not grow old. But, mark, they die. Hence, to live eternally they must live here earnestly. If they are part of some vast abstraction, it shall not overwhelm them here. Here, at least, is their chance for individuality.—["Aes Triplex."]

With a sane and triumphant cheerfulness the superior individuals of the world rise above its mists of uncertainty and winds of chance. Take what precautions science prescribes. Adopt all the safeguards of civilization that give liberty. But do not encumber your spirit with too much damping caution. For, after all, you have still to obey the sardonic god Pan, even though you know that the dinner table is as dangerous as a field of battle, and that the marriage bed is but the ambuscade of death.—["Pan's Pipes."]

How you begin, not how you end, is the thing that matters. It is not safety or Success, but Romance which makes for happiness. Success is the abstract philosophy of life; Romance is the concrete enjoyment of living. Success dries in the mouth; Romance is the unquenchable thirst. What then is life? How will you make your definition?

Look at the thing as broadly as you like, it will always come to this: your conduct, your looks, your very attitude hour by hour. Can you then succumb

to *Weltschmerz* because of a conviction of the impersonality of nature of which we human beings are but a base mechanical improvement in some part? What if the universe is made of dust, and we are a warming, a disease, of this agglutinated dust? Does that relieve us of any part of our conduct? Does not the desire for good, the Implacable Hunter, still follow at our heels? By which will you live—a guess, or your own experience?—[“*Pulvis et Umbra.*”]

Obviously we are not intended to succeed. Disappointment paves the way for another effort, for further hope, which are the only satisfactions. A Faithful Failure—that is the description of our great man.—[“A Christmas Sermon.”]

Success is sad. Desire and curiosity are the two eyes through which to see the world in enchanted colors.—[“*El Dorado.*”]

### III

This is the description, in these essays, of Stevenson's characteristic thought about life from his vantage point on the rim of the crater. It is a gay philosophy, and every philosopher knows that it is harder to be gay than grim. It boasts, but it is never a mockery. It decks itself out with bravado to challenge the crucial moment, but with a bravado that is cheer, that covers zeal and not weakness. It is a philosophy delicately strong, which your *too* zeal-



ous mortal can not lay hold of without crushing, and which ~~your~~ fool always ruins with unintelligent enthusiasm. It is always, let it be remembered, the finely wrought expression of a man disciplined in the school which unconquerable egotism keeps with unconquerable fate. It is Stevenson's distinctive note; and it was first distinctly struck in his letters from Mentone, and in his essay, "Ordered South," which is almost as personal as a letter, and which was written with a touch of stylish bravery for his own encouragement and for the cheer of others.

This essay, so full of his genial egotism, of his sociability, of his common sense touched with humor, marks the brave beginning of the life he was to face. For a few years, now, and the most important period of his artistic development, it is true that trouble was less ominous. The crust thickened a little under his feet. But the reverberation was still there. It is important to understand that Stevenson was never a sentimental optimist. His optimism always lay in the fact that he saw happiness take on a certain gay color of bravery, even when the worst evil was upon him. In the year before he died he wrote to George Meredith, from Vailima Plantation, an often-quoted letter presenting his case against fate. He says that he has not had a day's real health for fourteen years, and yet he has kept on writing.

"For years after I came here the critics (those

genial gentlemen) used to deplore the relaxation of my fibre and the idleness to which I had succumbed. I hear less of this now; the next thing is they will tell me I am writing myself out! and that my unconscientious conduct is bringing their grey hairs with sorrow to the dust. I do not know—I mean I do know one thing. For fourteen years I have not had a day's real health; I have wakened sick and gone to bed weary; and I have done my work unflinchingly. I have written in bed, and written out of it, written in hemorrhages, written in sickness, written torn by coughing, written when my head swam for weakness; and for so long it seems to me I have won my wager and recovered my glove. I am better now, have been rightfully speaking since first I came to the Pacific; and still few are the days when I am not in some physical distress. And the battle goes on—ill or well, is a trifle; so as it goes. I was made for a contest, and the Powers have so willed that my battlefield should be this dingy, inglorious one of the bed and the physic bottle. At least I have not failed, but I would have preferred a place of trumpetings and the open air over my head."

These are the facts, not quite so fearsome, perhaps, as they appear in this bald catalogue; but do they not furnish more than an inkling of the character and energy of the man who could dominate them by his imagination, who could with a gesture relegate the cheerless part of them to a corner of

his life. This man was the child who made a play out of the hours of sickness, who had grown up from the land of make-believe and dreams into the real world grim with trouble, carrying with him for defense a store of that practical, romantic courage which only the enduring fancy of youth provides. Thus Stevenson's literary character, so distinctly his personal character as well, will be seen to be the result of the conflict between his ambition and his health. It smacks always of the fortunes of this war, of the reverses as well as of the successes, of the attack and of the counter-attack, but always, whether in good or ill fortune, of the gallantry with which the war was conducted. "I will do nothing I cannot do smiling!" This is not mere bravado.

"It is better to lose<sup>1</sup> health like a spendthrift than to waste it like a miser. It is better to live and be done with it than to die daily in the sickroom. By all means begin your folio: even if the doctor does not give you a year, even if he hesitates about a month, make one brave push and see what can be accomplished in a week." It is not only in finished undertakings that we ought to honour useful labour. A spirit goes out of the man who means execution which outlives the most untimely ending. All who have meant good work with their whole hearts have done good work, although they may die before they have the time to sign it. Every heart that has beat strong and cheerfully has left a hopeful impulse behind it in the world, and bettered the tradition of

mankind. And even if death catch people, like an open pitfall, and in mid-career, laying out vast projects and planning monstrous foundations, flushed with hope, and their mouths full of boastful language, they should be at once tripped up and silenced: is there not something brave and spirited in such a termination? and does not life go down with a better grace, foaming in full body over a precipice, than miserably straggling to an end in sandy deltas? When the Greeks made their fine saying that those whom the gods love die young, I cannot help believing they had this sort of death also in their eye. For surely, at whatever age it overtake the man, this is to die young. Death has not been suffered to take so much as an illusion from his heart. In the hot-fit of life, a-tiptoe on the highest point of being, he passes at a bound on to the other side. The noise of the mallet and chisel is scarcely quenched, the trumpets are hardly done blowing, when, trailing with him clouds of glory, this happy-starred, full-blooded spirit shoots into the spiritual land."—"Aes Triplex," *Virginibus Puerisque*.

Stevenson's winter in Mentone, with its record of friendships, and the writing of "Ordered South," shows us what the foundation of his character had been and what the structure will be. As I have said, the discovery of the threatened disease was, in his condition of nervous exhaustion, a very great shock. During the first morbid fear of dying he developed a fantastic, yet easily accountable, anxiety over not

being able to repay the money his father was spending on him. Morbidity had been part of Stevenson's problem for several years, and it was only by a moral struggle, as I think can be seen from the essay, that he conquered it. But once conquered it did not easily return. Rarely again, though in the face of a thousand difficulties, did his gay philosophy desert him. Let me repeat here that the author of "Ordered South" is the author, five years later, of "Aes Triplex"; of the "Requiem" in 1884, after a like period; of "Pulvis et Umbra" and "A Christmas Sermon" in 1888; of the letter to George Meredith from which I have quoted, written in 1893, a year before his death.

#### IV

In November he had already learned from Doctor Bennet, at Nice, that there was still no definite sign of tuberculosis, and that with care he might entirely avoid it. He spent a lazy winter, making little attempt to write, except for an essay or two; and, having perforce to forego all the more strenuous pleasures of Mentone, such as the marvelous climbs on the heights behind the town, he passed a great deal of time at his hotel with some Russians and Americans, about whose children he composed a paper. Colvin made him two visits. In April it was thought he could safely return to England. He stopped in Paris to see his cousin Bob, who was becoming a painter, and who was from now on the

plausible attraction that brought Stevenson from Edinburgh to France. He proceeded to Edinburgh in May, 1874. But he was never again to remain in Scotland over three months at a time.

His health, though now much improved, was never good in Scotland. His letters for the next few years make one realize the continual discomfort of his life—sore throats, colds, rheumatism, gout—through all of which he kept at his difficult task of writing. Out of Scotland he seems always more vigorous and in what his biographers speak of as “comparative health and strength.” Out of Scotland he was equal to rather rough trips and to some exposure; he was able to exercise more freely, to sleep out under the stars, and to follow the whims of his vagabond nature. For on leaving Mentone it is to be observed that his long wandering had begun, which never ceased until his death and which yet seemed so little to disturb the continuity of his life. It was a long wandering after many things which no man can follow without overwhelming disorder and fatuity, if at all, unless his character is growing in a strenuous and clear purpose.

## CHAPTER V

### VAGABONDAGE AND CRAFTSMANSHIP

#### I

**T**O a young man the world seems always rather elderly. His family and friends are, first and last, prudential. Dull Respectability sits in office chairs and stalks the street in long coats. Solid Citizenship appears to be the one legitimate goal. To dare greatly is not a virtue; to fail to experiment is not cowardice. And a slight incongruity between a daily method of life and a declared purpose in life indicates a flaw in one's make-up that bodes disaster. No miracles are possible except those at a religious revival. No allowance is made for the moral probabilities and transformations of genius. The elderly world takes little account of genius and insists first on some respectable beginnings, some utterly safe successes. The elderly world, judging by the cautious rule and not by the hopeful exception, knows that failure to settle down indicates that a young man has no purpose. It always prefers fixity to energy; in fact, unless energy radiates from an established source it hardly recognizes it as energy at all. To prudential family and friends, the failure

to *settle down* is a clear sign that a young man's pretensions to genius are the result of the untrained enthusiasm of youth, not of a clear understanding of the circumstances of life. It smacks of defiance and further failure, not of success.

World, family, and friends are usually right; and in Stevenson's case, his behavior during these critical years, his refusal to find out what regular habits would do for his health, must have been to all concerned peculiarly discouraging. Even granting him genius, there could have been little difficulty in showing that, logically, his literary production would be sounder if he came to it from some sort of professional point of view than from a boyish decision to be a free lance and to live solely for experience. Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, entered literature through the gateway of paid journalism. Trollope's opportunities as a post-office official furnished him with his earliest materials, and, throughout his career, with the necessary observation of life. Charles Reade had been a lawyer. The polite essayists, Lamb and Hazlitt, whose manners Stevenson somewhat copied, were respectively a business man and a painter. Of his friends, Gosse was a librarian, Henley was to be an editor, Meredith was a professional reader and reviewer, and Lang an Oxford don. Of the other men who were growing up about him, Hardy had been an architect, Hall Caine was to be an architect, Kipling and Barrie were both journalists. It is, in fact, difficult to think of many exceptions to the rule that successful literary men



learn life and how to see life afresh from the vantage of an active business or profession, from a position in life which is primarily practical rather than primarily critical. The most significant men of the present hour, Conrad, Wells, Bennett, Galsworthy, De Morgan, were all trained for literature, not as Stevenson trained himself by going about with "a book to read in and another book to write in," while playing truant to a practical task; they were trained by paying attention to practical tasks, in seamanship, in biology, in journalism, in official work, in archæology.

Yet no such list of authors with a professional background makes a valid argument for the ultimate failure of the unattached writer. (What failure it does predict for him is chiefly temporary and financial, and the prediction was thus far true for Stevenson's case in that he did not for many years earn from his pen a living wage.) It is to be especially noticed that such a list of writers who safeguard genius by a profession includes few poets. Among the poets there would be a whole set of names that bring to mind no profession, no practical beginnings, and rarely as much "schooling" as Stevenson had received. Nearly all the poets of note have begun as poets and have done little else in the line of regular achievement but write poetry. Now Stevenson's romantic way of life, his method of observation and work, are essentially those of a poet. It has been already noted that he has the same sort of egotistical purposes, or *raisons d'être*,

as belong to the poetic temperament. It is hardly to be believed that his production would have been more vital and durable than it is for a longer apprenticeship in a definite profession.

## II

To understand, from this point of view, Stevenson's accomplishment, its relation to his character and to his outward life, nothing is more important than to visualize at once broadly and exactly his energies during this period after he returned from Mentone. His life from 1874 to 1880 presents such a picture of random comings and goings, dwellings here and there and nowhere, plans perfected only to be abandoned, articles written only to be torn up, that it requires some patience if not some special knowledge of the psychology of romantic genius to catch the drift of it all and to perceive his essential consistency.

Sir Sidney Colvin, speaking of Stevenson's talk at this period, calls him the "past-master of the random." The phrase will apply as well, though with a slightly different meaning, to his part in life during his apprenticeship. If Stevenson was always a wanderer and vagabond, he was also a master of the art of random living. This is a sanctioning title by which many an artist might seek to defend his way of life, and it should imply a control of the providential and changing details of a wanderer's existence by a constant artistic purpose. In the

end Stevenson's purpose is apparent, his character emerges from confusion and dominates.

Let it be understood that he was, during this period, in possession of a sufficient allowance—seven pounds a month—to support the bare necessities of life where he would, and that in 1875, on becoming advocate at the Scottish bar he received from his father an instalment of his patrimony, one thousand pounds, which, however, lasted him and his impecunious friends a very short time. Certainly there was little or none of this sum left when he started for California in 1879. From his writing he made only a few pounds—Mr. Balfour says never over fifty pounds—before 1878, his first great year of production. It should also be borne in mind that the necessities of his health, joining naturally with his inclination, led him to cultivate a roving disposition. His health during this period probably hampered, no more than stimulated, his literary activity; but unquestionably he was never very well. The recovery at Mentone was only a recovery from acute nervous breakdown, and when Stevenson began his voyage to California he was already suffering from serious weakness of the lungs.

A mere itinerary of Stevenson's doings for the six years following his return to Edinburgh, in May, 1874, is the fundamental comment on his character and aims. Therefore let us observe it carefully. In Edinburgh and Swanston during May and June, 1874, he was finishing his essay on Victor Hugo for

Leslie Stephen, editor of *The Cornhill*, and was rather fitfully at work on a study of Walt Whitman. He finished the paper called "Movements of Young Children" and a review of Lytton's *Fables in Song*. Meanwhile Mentone had not cured his tendency to sore throat, and he also found himself suffering from that confusion in his head which he had complained of and learned to tolerate during his convalescence. He made a visit to Hampstead with Colvin; and in August, much set up by a short yachting trip with Sir Walter Simpson, he went with his parents to North Wales. The article on Knox occupied him now for some time, and incidentally he printed a pamphlet called *An Appeal to the Clergy of the Church of Scotland*. From a letter, it appears that he was writing some of those short fables that were published posthumously. In November he walked through Buckinghamshire, and later made a sketch of his experiences, "An Autumn Effect," for *The Portfolio*. After visiting London he was again, before the end of the month, in Edinburgh and at work on a story, one of the many never printed, "King Matthias's Hunting Horn," which excited him "like wine, or fire, or death, or love or something," because it seemed so "weird and fantastic." "Nothing of my own writing," he says to Mrs. Sitwell, "ever excited me so much." He forthwith proceeds to write an Italian story, "When the Devil was Well," and some dozen others, none ever quite finished, but of which he makes a list that gives him the idea of immediate publication in book form.

"A book with boards is a book with boards; even if it bain't a very fat one." This plan for a book, conceived in January 1875, seems to have evaporated in February. That month is notable for his meeting Henley at the City Hospital. April saw him in Barbizon with the ideas for "Forest Notes" beginning to "bubble" in his mind. Before the end of the month he is back in Edinburgh. His bar examination was looming up, and though he wrote an article on Burns for the *Britannica* (which turned out to be not quite suitable), he devoted himself to reading law, and he passed his examination creditably on July fourteenth.

To this end he had been nominally at work for four years. Yet he never made more than a perfunctory effort to practise, and the most obvious result of the whole performance was to prove conclusively to his father that he would not become a solid Edinburgh citizen in a solid profession of any kind. Thomas Stevenson, in spite of his son's growing literary success, appears to have acquired no new faith in his character. The way in which the patrimony of one thousand pounds disappeared could not have mended matters, and it was only after R. L. S.'s marriage and return from California that his father began to understand the force of that soft and pliant nature which had grown up under his eye.

Stevenson was at Barbizon and Loiret in August, writing "Forest Notes"; and with his parents at Wiesbaden and Homburg later in the summer. The

winter of 1875-76 was spent with considerable discomfort in Edinburgh, where he made a faint-hearted attempt to practise law. In January he took a short walking trip in Carrick and Galloway, described in one of his essays. During the spring he wrote the articles on "Béranger," "Walking Tours," and "Charles d'Orleans." In August, after a tour in the West Highlands, he and Sir Walter Simpson canoed down the Oise, winding up at Barbizon and Grez. The record of this expedition, *An Inland Voyage*, which is Stevenson's first book, is by no means the most important matter connected with it. The voyage led to his meeting Mrs. Osbourne at Grez and determined him in his resolution not to settle down in Edinburgh.

For Stevenson the leisure and the romantic excitement of this autumn was immediately fruitful. Some of his unsurpassably best work followed—the first part of *Virginibus Puerisque*, the essay on Idlers, and the essay on Villon. Besides, he wrote the farcical fragment called "The Hair Trunk." The winter of 1876-77 saw him at work in Edinburgh on these things, together with what are perhaps his two cleverest short stories, "The Sire de Malétroit's Door" and "A Lodging for the Night." No work of Stevenson shows so well the genius with which he caught the kindred spirit of French romances. In a letter to Mrs. Sitwell from Penzance in August he mentions "The Sire de Malétroit's Door" and "Will o' the Mill" as being finished, and an essay on "The Two Saint Michaels' Mounts" and

a story called "The Stepfather's Story" as being "in the clouds." "You see," he adds, "how work bubbles in my mind."

Eighteen hundred seventy-eight was his great year. He was extraordinarily restless and extraordinarily productive; and his friendship with Mrs. Osbourne was his great inspiration. The list of this year's essays, stories, plays, was enough to establish a considerable fame. In *The Cornhill* appeared "Will o' the Mill," "Crabbed Age and Youth," "Aes Triplex," "English Admirals," "Child's Play"; in *London* (which Henley edited), "A Plea for Gas Lamps," "Pan's Pipes," "El Dorado," "Providence and the Guitar"; in *The Temple Bar*, "The Sire de Malétroit's Door"; in *The New Quarterly*, "Walt Whitman"; in *The Portfolio*, and also in book form, *Picturesque Notes on Edinburgh*. Besides these was the play *Deacon Brodie*, written with Henley, and his first book, the *Inland Voyage*. The year was spent chiefly in France; and these things were composed in Dieppe, Paris, Monastir (where he began his donkey excursion), Barbizon and Grez. He also made visits in London, Cambridge and Burford Bridge. During the winter he was in Edinburgh writing *Travels with a Donkey*. In August, 1879, he followed Mrs. Osbourne to California.

These six years of continual wandering, with their great variety of experience and literary effort, matured Stevenson in his craft. He had not, it is true, written any of his few longer works. He was still over-full of mere plans and beginnings; and indeed

all his life he continued to begin with enthusiasm and assurance ventures which never matured, which were either literary pastimes to be dropped in a day or two or which proved after much labor to lead only toward a mechanical and arbitrary ending. But by 1880 we may say that he had reached that way of thinking, that style, which is typical of his production as a whole. In the essays of *Virginibus Puerisque*, in "François Villon," in those masterpieces of short story and fable like "Will o' the Mill" and "Lodging for the Night," you will find his most representative traits. Also in such sketches as "Forest Notes," *Travels with a Donkey*, you will find his account of how he acquired these traits.

### III

The fact that Stevenson began his career as a writer with a great deal of sermonizing on the subject of craftsmanship is significant. It is in keeping with his self-consciousness, with his desire to write autobiography. It is part of his defense of his way of life. It has also undoubtedly helped to create the taste by which it is to be appreciated. Now there is in Stevenson a good deal of writing for writing's sake, a good deal of practise work, and this his philosophy of art accounts for. According to his professions in "A College Magazine," that essay where he lays down with emphasis his rules for the acquiring of craftsmanship, he went about



with two books in his pocket, one to read in and one to write in. As he walked or sat by the roadside he was busy fitting what he saw with appropriate words. He accompanied himself on his walks with dramatic dialogues and often wrote down conversations from memory. Thus he "lived with words." But this was not the most efficient part of his training, for it had one grave defect; it set no standard of achievement. There was more profit, as well as more effort, in certain exercises in imitation. Whenever he read any book or passage particularly pleasing he at once sat down "to ape that quality." In Hazlitt, Lamb, Wordsworth, Sir Thomas Browne, Defoe, Hawthorne, Montaigne, Baudelaire, Obermann, Ruskin, Browning, Keats, Thackeray, Dumas, he found masters to whom he could play "the sedulous ape," inspirers of his "monkey-tricks." And though he calls them "monkey-tricks," "arts of impersonation," and "purely ventriloquial efforts," he concludes his confession of faith as follows: "That, like it or not, it is the way to learn to write; whether I have profited or not, that is the way. It was so Keats learned, and there was never a finer temperament for literature than Keats's; it was so, if we could trace it out, that all men have learned."

To many people this has seemed an amazing and unnatural doctrine. For it is doctrine; and whether you believe that Stevenson could really have persisted long in so self-conscious a mood, or whether you take his statement as illustrating only his gen-

eral zeal of purpose, it still remains true that Stevenson, looking back over his apprenticeship years, believed such habits and methods to be essential and usual influences in the acquisition of craftsmanship. But who, it is asked, besides Stevenson, ever carried out this sort of thing literally and completely? Perhaps not many people. But nearly all our great poets have comprehended the originality of somebody else so intimately that it was creative in their own minds. Keats and Milton acknowledge Spenser to be their master. Wordsworth is greatly indebted to Cowper. Byron learned much of his art from Pope. This means, however, not that they learned to think by studying models, but that they learned how better to hear and visualize their thoughts. The technique of poetry consists largely in making thought sensational; and just as the painter trains his eye by copying pictures, by submitting to the masters, so the poet acquires some power of words by catching the glint and the true ring of them. It can not be inferred that his own compositions are echoes. The power to write as artists write consists not only in thinking logically and simply, but in feeling vividly while one writes. The second part of this unified process, usually thought of as the first, is not alone the fixing of thought in language, but the transforming of sensation into thought and the preservation of it still as sensation in language. And it is in this matter that exercises in imitation count, for they bring a writer to a more thorough understanding of the sensational texture

of language than he can possibly arrive at independently.

This kind of imitation, as Stevenson practised it, is a form of curiosity. The artist wishes to get the feel of the language, and he imitates a manner or a tone, not for the sake of modeling his own thoughts in the same way, but for the sake of satisfying his curiosity as to what that peculiar manner and tone consist in. A perfectly literal following of Stevenson's famous advice would require the same sort of persistence that Stevenson himself showed and would almost certainly help a man to discover the vein of his originality. Few men, however, have sufficient character or curiosity to investigate their capabilities in this way. As regards carrying about a note-book to write in by the wayside, there are doubtless few honest adherents to that extreme doctrine; but I find pasted into my copy of *Memories and Portraits* the following instance, which I believe is from a book of reminiscences by a well-known journalist:

"Years ago, in old vacation swimming days, and in a prosy little Western river, I used to swim across to the diving log with a notebook and a pencil in my teeth; these instruments were deposited on the log, and up from every dive I came to scribble in the notebook another wet-fingered phrase or two of the underwater world, of how the sun looked like a lamp in a dome, of how my swimming comrades were turned golden, green, beautiful! for I was

writing a poem on Hylas and the nymphs. So in another year I was writing upon a theme whose symbol and image was the wind blowing, and, of course, a girl in the wind; I watched five seasons through, watched and caught at and tried to express those beautiful living images. I remember an undated midwinter in Chicago—or was it New York?—when at the corners of those deep city cañons every woman became, this instant and that, statuary beautiful as the winged Victory. . . . If I may paraphrase Stevenson, that, like it or not, is the way to learn to tell the truth; whether I have profited or not, that is the way. Live it out for yourself, and all these things shall be added unto you, the rules and the rules, as you grow in wise experience of your own life.”

This is interesting because it indicates the danger in which Stevenson himself too often fell—the danger of painting instead of writing. When a young realist, aged fifteen (?) must write his poem by diving under the river to find an adjective, coming up to record *golden*, diving for another and coming up to record *green*, he is applying to literature precisely the methods of the more sensational art of painting. He is indeed painting and not writing.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> That the note-book realist does not have the poets on his side may be seen from the following instance, cited in Knight's edition of Wordsworth's poems: "Mr. Aubrey de Vere tells of a conversation he had with Wordsworth, in which he vehemently condemned the ultra-realistic poet, who goes to Nature with 'pencil and note-book, and jots down whatever strikes him most,' adding, 'Nature does not permit an inven-

In the next chapter there will be a good deal to say about the influence of the painter's art on Stevenson's style, an influence not wholly beneficial. But what Stevenson once wrote in a letter to his young friend, Mr. Trevor Haddon, now a member of the Royal Society of British Artists, about art in general shows his broad understanding of theory as well as his private enthusiasm for technique. He heads his remarks, "Notes for the student of any art:" "1. Keep an intelligent eye on *all* the others. It is only by doing so that you come to see what Art is: Art is the end common to them all; it is none of the points by which they differ 2. In this age, beware of realism. 3. In your own art, bow your head over technique. Think of technique when you rise and when you go to bed. Forget purposes in the meanwhile; get to love technical processes, to glory in technical successes; get to see the world entirely through technical spectacles, to see it entirely in terms of what you can do. Then when you have anything to say, the language will be apt and copious."

┌ This idealistic doctrine leads us to perceive some-

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tory to be made of her charms! He should have left his pencil and note-book at home; fixed his eye as he walked with a reverent attention on all that surrounds him, and taken all into a heart that could understand and enjoy. Afterwards he would have discovered that while much of what he had admired was preserved to him, much was also most wisely obliterated. *That which remained, the picture surviving in his mind, would have presented the ideal and essential truth of the scene, and done so in large part by discarding much which, though in itself striking, was not characteristic.* In every scene, many of the most brilliant details are but accidental."

thing of the incumbencies that are laid on the man who recognizes in himself this aim. And it may help us to account for the conscious effort he makes to be sensitive to and to encompass a hundred passing impressions which we more practical beings, bent only on choosing the practical and advantageous, can neglect. In fact, to pay much attention to those other impressions blinds us to the real issues and, as we say, makes dreamers or idlers of us so that we "get nowhere."

This is what world, family, and friends have said of many an artist during his period of vagabondage, his *Wanderjahre*, and it was of course said of Stevenson. He was known and pointed out, he tells us, for the pattern of an idler. The modern world does not recognize the rights of any but the successful artist to demand periods of complete leisure and liberty. So in the face of a busy world, and for that world's good, the novice must often take what it would seem to deny him—the right to look on just for the sake of looking on, the right to experience life just for the sake of the experience. He will not often defend his productive idleness in advance of his production; and the world has no way of distinguishing the seemingly idle artist from the ultimately vain. The novice, knowing instinctively that it is his task to feel the whole of life actually or in imagination, and to feel it without confusion, finds in his instinct the warrant for his way of life. To him his idleness appears full and serious—an opportunity to note all the contingencies of his experi-

ence, out of which he must shortly produce a simple, ordered, and vivid picture.

As we have already seen in "An Apology for Idlers," which Stevenson wrote in 1877 while idling somewhere between Barbizon and Edinburgh, he understood how to defend the *morale* of his apprenticeship. If it is after your fancy you will find more of the same doctrine in "Pan's Pipes," "Forest Notes," "Walking Tours," and many illustrations of it in *Travels with a Donkey* and the other excursions of this period. "Providence and the Guitar," is a story written in its special humor. "Will o' the Mill" is its more serious reflection.

Stevenson's fundamental proposition is worth recurring to here :

"If the business of all men is to learn the art of living, it is especially that of the artist. Sainte-Beuve," says Stevenson, "came to regard all experience as a single great book, in which to study for a few years ere we go hence ; and it seemed all one to him whether you should read in Chapter XX, which is the differential calculus, or in Chapter XXXIX, which is hearing the band play in the gardens. As a matter of fact, an intelligent person, looking out of his eyes and harkening in his ears, with a smile on his face all the time, will get more true education than many another in a life of heroic vigils. There is certainly some chill and arid knowledge to be found upon the summits of formal and laborious

science; but it is all round about you, and for the trouble of looking, that you will acquire the warm and palpitating facts of life."—"Apology for Idlers," *Virginibus Puerisque*.

Idleness does not imply being lazy. The artist makes of it the most important thing he has to do. He can never be vacant, dull, negative. One day at Mentone, while sitting on an olive-clad slope behind the town, Stevenson had noticed how the flurries of wind made "little silverings" over the sea of branches as the undersides of the leaves caught the light. He writes to Mrs. Sitwell that he tried for long to hit on some language that would give ever so faintly this impression, "but the Muse was not favorable." It may seem as if this were a particularly idle and trivial occupation and that he might have better devoted himself to the Horace which he had in his pocket. As a matter of fact, one hour spent in trying to solve personally one of the problems of composition can often give more insight into the *Art of Poetry* than many hours of reading in Horace. The problem was in this case a very difficult one. "Little silverings," as Stevenson recognized, is not the phrase to comprehend the impression. "Hoary in the wind" some one else has suggested; but that does not catch the shifting color of the leaves. There are certain impressions of nature among them the most beautiful, which have so far escaped the faculties, the coordinations, of either



poet or painter; and this particular sensation which one marvels at wherever there are olive trees, is one of them. At Mentone it is made of an intermingled glimmering of sun and air and trees against the "blue of the sea" as Stevenson's letter suggests. But if Stevenson, like other sojourners on the Riviera, failed to compose these elements so as to satisfy the sensational memory, the attempt was the kind of exercise that led toward art. It was the sort of attempt which led him to be successful in many similar instances; which enabled him to describe, for the benefit of his favorite scoundrel, Villon, the snow falling in the streets of Paris: "Flake after flake descended out of the black night air, silent, circuitous, interminable . . . the whole city was sheeted up." Look at the snow falling on a still winter night and see if any other elements will so readily compose the picture for you. "Sheeted up" was a phrase he had hit on several years before to describe snow-fields in Carrick. Take another common sensation, the wind round your house on a November night. What are your words for it? It roars, sobs, sings, sighs, soughs, rattles, and so on, for you. For Stevenson, writing casual letters to his friends, it is a "flapping wind," it is a horseman riding past with his cloak about his head, it is "the audible haunting of an incarnate anger about the house"; it is a great west wind "flapping above one like an immense banner, and every now and then swooping furiously against my windows." Have you ever thought of anything in

connection with the wind as vivid as that—"flapping above one like an immense banner"?

Stevenson's writing is full of what we may call sensations of place. While basking in the Mediterranean sun at Mentone his thoughts traveled northward, "and many a doleful vignette of the grim wintry streets at home returns to him, and begins to haunt his memory. The hopeless, huddled attitude of tramps in doorways; the flinching gait of barefoot children on the icy pavement; the sheen of the rainy streets toward afternoon; the meagre anatomy of the poor defined by the clinging of wet garments; the high canorous note of the Northerner on days when the very houses seem to stiffen with cold; these, and such as these, crowd back upon him, and mockingly substitute themselves for the fanciful winter scenes with which he had pleased himself awhile before." ("Ordered South," *Virginibus Puerisque*.) That is Edinburgh, the northern town, the picture of winter chill. I recall my own first impression of that city, one September evening, while I was standing at a windy corner of High Street looking down on the town and far across to the widening Forth. My guide-book under my arm, or the friend at my elbow, had told me that Edinburgh is the most picturesque city in Europe. But at that moment I saw beyond the possibility of any words which one ordinarily has at his command; and that moment remained long in memory, vivid, haunting, and quite inarticulate. I made no effort to reduce it to words. I felt sim-

ply that I had seen Edinburgh, its history, its romance. Once at a concert, a piece of music by Chopin revived the impression sharply; but it was not till I came across a sentence of Stevenson's, years later, that I *knew*, as we say, what I had seen. It was "the gloom of high-lying, old stone cities, imminent on the windy seaboard." For me that was instantly the composition of my memory. A writer does not do many such things for one so simply and finally, without there being in his mind the recurrent purpose of seeing and arranging the essential elements in every phase of his surroundings. It is thus a purpose by which the casual continually becomes, or is constrained to be, of practical import. In Stevenson's case, though his writing suffers from a certain attendant self-consciousness and other obvious dangers, this purpose is none the less the source of his facility and his power.

Stevenson's letters during this period, especially those to Mrs. Sitwell, are full of his interest in casual and passing scenes—*genre* pictures of the streets; brief vivid notes on the conditions of nature about him; the effects of weather (there is always a great deal about clouds and wind in his letters); the trees and flowers. He is a thorough-going impressionist—there is always the general atmosphere and out of it one or two salient details obtruding. Whether it is a chill, foggy day in Edinburgh that strikes his attention, or Avignon and its old bridge in a glare of sun, it is very apt to be formed into a picture in much the same way

that a painter of the Barbizon school would form it.<sup>1</sup>

In his letters these things afford glimpses of his natural, spontaneous imagination. But the same impetus, carried too far, led him to write a series of longish "fragments" commemorating various little tours he made on foot—"Cockermouth and Keswick," "An Autumn Effect," "A Winter's Walk in Carrick and Galloway." They resemble chiefly the sketches of a painter before he knows just what he wants to do. They are interesting chiefly in relation to some final result. But in Stevenson's case there is no specific final result, and hence they remain mere *tours de force*. Yet how much oftener does greatness in creative art grow out of the vagaries of a youth who is bent on climbing high by constant experiment than out of the little wisdom of him who learns early a successful method of securing what is on a level with his nose!

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<sup>1</sup> For illustration, see his *Letters*, Biographical Edition, Vol. I, pp. 75, 84, 93, 103, 110, 129.

## CHAPTER VI

### VAGABONDAGE AND CRAFTSMANSHIP: BARBIZON

#### I

STEVENSON, who in many respects of his art never matured, was always an experimentalist. Though he became, as Mr. Copeland has said in his essay on Stevenson,<sup>1</sup> "perfect on the page," the page, in relation to the whole, is often fragmentary. In many of Stevenson's productions of this time and later, productions which lack sweep and comprehensiveness, there is only this kind of piecemeal perfection. No author who has written so many quotable passages has written so few great books. In the essay and in the short tale, his best qualities, which are those of fine workmanship rather than of large structure, shine. In a small compass they can not diffuse themselves. Work of which he could see the end and the shape when he began it, he could properly fill out. But the very qualities that led to success *on the page* seem rather to have

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<sup>1</sup> *The Atlantic Monthly*, April, 1895. Mr. Hammerton, the editor of that most interesting volume, *Stevensoniana*, quotes this essay at some length, and regards it very properly, in the present writer's opinion, as the best single essay on Stevenson's art.

blinded him to the cause of failure in many of his longer books.

Critically, Stevenson understood the broader functions of the novelist's art. This is evident from his extreme devotion to Meredith and from his admiration of Hugo, two authors who together include nearly all the positive virtues that he lacked. Yet, though he describes in his essay on Hugo the dominating moral and artistic forces of that writer as they combine to emphasize each other and make one purpose, Stevenson himself but rarely succeeds in that aim of all true art. In *The Master of Ballantrae*, for example, you follow him for a certain number of pages in surprise at his vivid eye and at what seems a carefully suspended plot. Then you begin to doubt if he knows just what he is doing it all for. At the end you are convinced that he never had a real plan—only a vivid fancy which flashes here and there, and which, so far as illumination of the whole is concerned, grows dimmer.

In possible explanation of this, I think it should be noted once more that during several crucial years, Stevenson was too strongly affected by the influence of Barbizon and the methods of the painter. A painter needs much practise here and there in the details of composition in order to secure manual aptness; but mental aptness is what the writer is after, and that is properly secured by pursuing some definite and important end to which observation, or sketching, is but contributory. Of this Barbizon influence, "Forest Notes" is the most direct result. It is

a series of charming sketches composed in the forest of Fontainebleau itself or at Siron's Inn (now the Hôtel de l'Exposition), that favorite and most congenially Bohemian resting place of all Stevenson's vagabondage. A person who walks across the forest from Fontainebleau to Barbizon may make a curious study in contrast. The palace of Fontainebleau, one of the most tritely and formally arranged palaces in France, filled with the vapid gilt and porcelain conventions of her chief period of outward splendor; the park, swept, clipped, geometrically perfect and in all its details the exact counterpart of an exercise by a garden poet—these stand on one side of the forest as monuments of splendid, decorative order. On the other side, at a morning's walk, is Siron's Inn and Barbizon. Here everything is irregular, rambling, full of promiscuous vines and flowers. Siron's Inn is as far a cry from the palace of Fontainebleau as can be imagined.

“Siron's Inn, that excellent artists' barrack, was managed upon easy principles. At any hour of the night, when you returned from wandering in the forest, you went to the billiard-room and helped yourself to liquors, or descended to the cellar and returned laden with beer or wine. The Siron's were all locked in slumber; there was none to check your inroads; only at the week's end a computation was made, the gross sum was divided, and a varying share set down to every lodger's name under the

rubric estrats. Upon the more long-suffering the larger tax was levied; and your bill lengthened in a direct proportion to the easiness of your disposition. At any hour of the morning, again, you could get your coffee, or cold milk, and set forth into the forest. The doves had perhaps wakened you, fluttering into your very chamber; and on the threshold of the inn you were met by the aroma of the forest. Close by were the great aisles, the mossy boulders, the interminable field of forest shadow. There you were free to dream and wander. And at noon, and again at six o'clock, a good meal awaited you on Siron's table. The whole of your accommodation, set aside that varying item of the estrats, cost you five francs a day; your bill was never offered you until you asked it; and if you were out of luck's way, you might depart for where you pleased and leave it pending.—"Fontainebleau," *Across the Plains*.

In spite of his sketcher's method which led him, as he says, to get ready his own palette "and lay out the color for a woodland scene in words," in spite of its being, that is, nothing more than a series of drawings of trees, boulders, glades, *bosquets ténébreux*, a set of themes on "The Woods by Night," "Siron's Inn," "The Woods in March," "The Freedom of the Woods" and so on, "Forest Notes" reproduces a total effect of marvelous actuality. I walked across the forest one day a few years ago. It has a character all its own; I have



never had the same forest impressions anywhere else; and it seemed to me precisely, and in all its variety, the forest of Stevenson's sketches. This would be, according to the principles of Barbizon, a crowning word of praise; but description for its own sake may scarcely be an end in literature. One of Stevenson's favorite authors of this period, George Borrow, might have taught him that; for Borrow always has in view some kind of arrival in his wanderings. But Stevenson has here little continuity other than that of his own footsteps. He disclaims any other. He winds up his disquisition with a section called "Morality," the gist of which is that in the forest, in this retired realm of art, there can be no morality, for everything there is but part of a picture. This is a moral which might tag all of Stevenson's *"Wanderjahre."*

It is part of Stevenson's nature and part of his rather vagabond art that he always held to this point of view. "He enjoyed a strenuous idleness full of visions." He says in "Fontainebleau" that to prate to the novice about the lofty aims and moral influence of art is the lad's ruin. "The love of words and not a desire to publish new discoveries, the love of form and not a novel reading of historical events, mark the vocation of the writer and the painter. The arabesque, properly speaking, and even in literature, is the first fancy of the artist; he first plays with his material as a child plays with a kaleidoscope; and he is already in a second stage when he begins to use his pretty counters for the

end of representation. In that, he must pause long and toil faithfully; that is his apprenticeship; and it is only the few who will really grow beyond it and go forward, fully equipped, to do the business of real art—to give life to abstractions and significance and charm to facts. In the meanwhile, let him dwell much among his fellow-craftsmen. They alone can take a serious interest in the childish tasks and pitiful successes of these years. They alone can behold with equanimity this fingering of the dumb keyboard, this polishing of empty sentences, this dull and literal painting of dull and insignificant subjects. Outsiders will spur him on. They will say, 'Why do you not write a great book, paint a great picture?' If his guardian angel fail him, they may even persuade him to the attempt, and, ten to one, his hand is coarsened and his style falsified for life."—"Fontainebleau," *Across the Plains*.

The danger of all this Stevenson himself well understood, and, as I have remarked and shall point out later in regard to his production as a whole, he himself suffered from the disease which he here goes on to describe. "And this brings me to a warning. The life of the apprentice to any art is both unstrained and pleasing; it is strewn with small successes in the midst of a career of failure, patiently supported; the heaviest scholar is conscious of a certain progress; and if he come not appreciably nearer to the art of Shakespeare, grows letter-per-

fect in the domain of A-B, ab. But the time comes when a man should cease prelusory gymnastic, stand up, put a violence upon his will, and for better or worse, begin the business of creation. This evil day there is a tendency continually to postpone; above all with painters. They have made so many studies that it has become a habit; they make more, the walls of exhibitions blush with them; and death finds these aged students still busy with their horn-book. This class of man finds a congenial home in artist villages; in the slang of the English colony at Barbizon we used to call them 'Snoozers.' Continual returns to the city, the society of men farther advanced, the study of great works, a sense of humour, or, if such a thing is to be had, a little religion or philosophy, are the means of treatment. It will be time enough to think of curing the malady after it has been caught; for to catch it is the very thing for which you seek that dream-land of the painters' village."—"Fontainebleau," *Across the Plains*.

## II

The influence of this fashion of observing life through the half-shut eye, together with what Stevenson calls a "disinterested love of dullness," is felt a little too largely in Stevenson's first book, *An Inland Voyage*, a pleasant diary of an unexciting canoe trip, in August, 1876, with Sir Walter Simpson, from Antwerp through the Sambre Canal and

down the Oise nearly to the Seine, as far as Pontoise. Stevenson later speaks of the book as "not badly written, thin, mildly cheery and strained." It is obviously written for the sake of style, which leads him to make much out of little and to "paint." But for all that, it is a pleasant diversion. When you finish it you have been to France again, talked with her people, played with her children, put up at her inns, and eaten of her food or gone hungry, always in the most companionable manner. Stevenson's journeys are always confidential, full of himself and without one touch of conceit. The joke, if there is one, is on the writer, who, though gallant at heart and fond of glowing words, never cuts too fine a figure on his own stage. Most of us, to ourselves, are rather awkward failures; and every man can find his points of sympathy with Stevenson, who does not pose as one of the world's strong, proud, successful products.

You must imagine him at this time extremely thin, one hundred sixteen pounds, with something rather unearthly in his face and eyes, a little more than usually absurd in his accoutrement, a velvet jacket and cap, a red sash with a knife stuck through it for bravado. Nearly everywhere he was the game of children of whom he pretends to be abnormally fearful, though he records one occasion of triumph over them: "They could not make enough of my red sash," he says of some inquisitive youngsters along the Sambre; "and my knife filled them with awe." In spite of the solid respectability

of Sir Walter Simpson, the pair were refused admittance at several inns. In others they were snubbed as pedlers. Stevenson says that though a born British subject, he never succeeded in convincing a single foreign official of his nationality. "For the life of me I cannot understand it. I, too, have been knolled to church and sat at good men's feasts, but I bear no mark of it. I am as strange as a Jack Indian to their official spectacles. I might come from any part of the globe, it seems, except from where I do." But he was not speaking the literal truth when he said he could not understand it. In fact he was rather fond of explaining it. To a friend who asked for a photograph, he wrote: "When I get one you shall have a copy. It will not be like me; sometimes I turn out a capital, fresh bank clerk; once I came out the image of Runjeet Singh; again a treacherous sun has fixed me in the character of a traveling evangelist. . . . The truth is I have no appearance; a certain air of disreputability is one constant character that my face presents; the rest change like water. But still I am lean, and still disreputable." In another sort of confession made somewhat later, when he may have been a wiser, though by no means a sadder man, he describes his attire. It was on the tramp which he and Sir Walter Simpson took in the valley of the Loing the following year—the epilogue to *An Inland Voyage*. He was, he says, unwisely dressed. That is, he had on an old, tarnished smoking-cap of Indian work, a black flannel shirt and other

rather curious misfits. The result—his arrest and imprisonment as a vagrant by the commissary of Châtillon-sur-Loire—is the example supreme of Stevensonian adventure and should be read by everybody for himself in the “Epilogue.”

But before that, one rainy night at La Fère on the Oise, and at other less respectable places, no doubt, Stevenson had suffered. It was not entirely for the sake of literature. He and Sir Walter had stowed their boats by the river and were proceeding toward La Fère on foot.

“At last a second gateway admitted us to the town itself. Lighted windows looked gladsome, whiffs of comfortable cookery came abroad upon the air. The town was full of the military reserve, out for the French Autumn manœuvres, and the reservists walked speedily and wore their formidable greatcoats. It was a fine night to be within doors over dinner and hear the rain upon the windows.

“The *Cigarette* and I could not sufficiently congratulate each other on the prospect, for we had been told there was a capital inn at La Fère. Such a dinner as we were going to eat! such beds as we were to sleep in! and all the while the rain raining on houseless folk over all the poplared country-side. It made our mouths water. The inn bore the name of some woodland animal, stag, or hart, or hind, I forget which. But I shall never forget how spacious and how eminently habitable it looked as we drew near. The carriage entry was lighted up, not

by intention, but from the mere superfluity of fire and candle in the house. A rattle of many dishes came to our ears; we sighted a great field of table-cloth; the kitchen glowed like a forge and smelt like a garden of things to eat.

"Into this, the inmost shrine and physiological heart of a hostelry, with all its furnaces in action and all its dressers charged with viands, you are now to suppose us making our triumphal entry, a pair of damp rag-and-bone men, each with a limp india-rubber bag upon his arm. I do not believe I have a sound view of that kitchen; I saw it through a sort of glory, but it seemed to me crowded with the snowy caps of cookmen, who all turned round from their saucepans and looked at us with surprise. There was no doubt about the landlady, however; there she was, heading her army, a flushed, angry woman, full of affairs. Her I asked politely—too politely, thinks the *Cigarette*—if we could have beds, she surveying us coldly from head to foot.

" 'You will find beds in the suburb,' she remarked. 'We are too busy for the like of you.'

"If we could make an entrance, change our clothes, and order a bottle of wine, I felt sure we could put things right; so said I, 'If we cannot sleep, we may at least dine'—and was for depositing my bag.

"What a terrible convulsion of nature was that which followed in the landlady's face! She made a run at us and stamped her foot.

" 'Out with you—out of the door!' she screeched.  
*'Sortez, sortez, sortez par la porte!'*

"I do not know how it happened, but next moment we were out in the rain and darkness, and I was cursing before the carriage like a disappointed mendicant. Where were the boating-men of Belgium? where the judge and his good wines? and where the graces of Origny? Black, black was the night after the firelit kitchen, but what was that to the blackness in our heart? This was not the first time that I have been refused a lodging. Often and often have I planned what I should do if such a misadventure happened to me again. And nothing is easier to plan. But to put in execution, with the heart boiling at the indignity? Try it; try it only once, and tell me what you did.

"It is all very fine to talk about tramps and morality. Six hours of police surveillance (such as I have had) or one brutal rejection from an inn door change your views upon the subject like a course of lectures. As long as you keep in the upper regions, with the world bowing to you as you go, social arrangements have a very handsome air; but once get under the wheels and you wish society were at the devil. I will give most respectable men a fortnight of such a life, and then I will offer them twopence for what remains of their morality.

"For my part, when I was turned out of the Stag, or the Hind, or whatever it was, I would have set



the temple of Diana on fire if it had been handy.”  
—*An Inland Voyage*.

Stevenson has recorded that he was once a red-hot theoretical socialist and that he had no regrets in looking back on that period of his life. He was all his life the right kind of practical every-day socialist; and such experiences as his absurd costume made him liable to were not without their value. Yet at this time he was intent on romance and individualism rather than on social uniformity. He liked to imagine, as he records in the “Epilogue,” that he resembled his vagabond scamp, François Villon. Perhaps he did—in the scamp’s few amiable traits. At all events, this outward defiance of convention—and it is a very queer queerness that is refused admittance to a French inn—really reflects his true state of mind. If *An Inland Voyage* has a secondary purpose in addition to the description of the day’s journey, it is to record Stevenson’s conviction that respectability, regularity, a professional career, an office chair, and the like, were now beyond the pale of possibility for him. Against them he poses the *Arethusa* and her swaggerish independence. What is worth while in life? For the artist is it not to note the turns of a river, the meadows and orchards, the margins of sedge, the cattle hanging their mild heads over the embankment, and a sleepy passing barge decorated with pots of flowers? “I am sure I would rather be a bargee than occupy any position under Heaven

that requires attendance at an office," cries Stevenson at the beginning of the book. "There are few callings, I should like to say, where a man gives up less of his liberty in return for regular meals." Always full of fanciful humors and romantic purposelessness, he seems to have most enjoyed little incidents of the merely casual sort. Handkerchiefs waved from a garden by the river caused quite a stir of heart. "And yet," he says, "how we should have wearied and despised each other, these girls and I, if we had been introduced at a croquet party! But this is a fashion I love: to kiss the hand or wave a handkerchief to people I shall never see again, to play with possibility, and knock in a peg for fancy to hang upon. It gives the traveler a jog, reminds him that he is not a traveler everywhere, and that his journey is no more than a siesta by the way on the real march of life."

### III

It was at the end of this voyage, I believe, that Stevenson, on repairing to Barbizon and Grez, found a much more serious affair on the real march of life than any he had yet encountered. Mrs. Osbourne, a California woman who had been for some time separated from her husband, was spending a few years in France for the education of her children. In August, 1876, she was amusing herself with a little sketching in the forest of Fontainebleau. She and Stevenson at once fell in love. With ro-

mance there came, as always, a practical problem—in this case peculiarly harassing and difficult. The uncertainty of Stevenson's health, the uncertainty of his finances, the uncertainty of Mrs. Osbourne's own problem, made a continually renewed strain which rendered him more than ever susceptible to a return of his physical troubles. At the same time he increased his efforts to prove himself financially equal to the situation; and in 1878 he earned enough from his pen to give him some warrant for the decision which he wished to make. Moreover, his trip through the Cevennes, in September and October of that year, which furnished him with the materials for his *Travels with a Donkey*, must have shown him that he had gained much in powers of observation. Though the book is in the same manner as *An Inland Voyage*, it contains far more reflection on life and more interest in the make-up of the community through which he traveled. The same thing is true of the fragment about Le Monastir, "A Mountain Town in France," the place from which he started on the excursion with "Modeste." It may be said that these two productions introduce us to the man who is shortly to write *The Amateur Emigrant* and *Across the Plains*. Like those remarkable and genuine studies of life, they prove that Stevenson had learned to give the notes of his sketch-book a durable importance. Many events were teaching him to see life more deeply.

In the autumn of 1878, Mrs. Osbourne re-

turned to America, and for a few weeks rejoined her husband in Indianapolis, their native town; but they separated once more, and she went on to California. She was seriously ill there during the winter. In the summer of 1879 she found that she could probably secure a divorce; and Stevenson no longer hesitated as to what his course should be. He engaged passage on an emigrant ship from Glasgow. In regard to such a step the disapproval of his parents was a foregone conclusion. They were not consulted; and his father, for a time, was inclined to put the worst construction on his son's conduct. No doubt the author of the productions of 1878 felt some confidence in his powers to face the world alone. But he could not count on health. His health at once belied him and made the next twelve months' experience matter for an epic of hardship.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE FIRST GREAT ADVENTURE

#### I

**F**OR a strong and healthy man what Stevenson now attempted would have proved a task with failure always imminent and the very possibility of success doubtful. For a man in Stevenson's condition, it meant, from the start, skirting the edge of tragedy. This fact is cheerfully accepted in the pages of *The Amateur Emigrant* and *Across the Plains*, and it is not by any means forgotten in *The Silverado Squatters*. It seems as if interest in life alone kept Stevenson alive during this year in America. For that never failed—that tremendous curiosity regarding all the circumstances about him, that interest in humanity which prevented his ever taking a morbid or negative view of any situation.

The sea voyage from Glasgow to New York on the *Devonia*, while he was playing his part of amateur emigrant, agreed with him in spite of the fact that what he calls "the national disease" was to all appearances definitely setting in. But the ten-day journey across the continent as a second-class passenger in the heat and dust of August was one of

his great mistakes and a risk he really had no right to run. With the strain and the bad nourishment of travel, his disease of the lungs, whatever its exact character may have been, gathered such headway that he arrived in California with his health, for the time being, and when he most needed it, completely wrecked.

But the account of his journey is a classic. It is the best of all his narratives of travel. It differs especially from the previous books in the change of emphasis from scenery and merely picturesque impressions to humanity and social ideas. He is here no longer trying to be a painter; or rather he is not content to be a mere observer. The attitude of the tourist has vanished. Every one who wishes to see what sort of man Stevenson's buffeting with the world had made of him should read Mrs. Stevenson's preface to *The Amateur Emigrant*. Indeed the finest, and I think the truest, picture of R. L. S. exists in her contributions to the volumes of *The Biographical Edition*; and this particular preface, with the succeeding pages of the narrative itself, makes a fundamental document for understanding his social point of view about life.

The book describes that most interesting of all scenes, the gradual drawing together and establishment of relations of a fixed group of people, previously strangers, aboard a passenger ship. Coming out of the Clyde all are looking askance at one another. Especially among the Englishmen distance and suspicion prevail. A day later, on leaving

Lough Foyle, the company begins "to draw together by inscrutable magnetisms." Formalities obtrude less and less. Natural curiosity, or what Anglo-Saxons prefer to call social instinct, begins to modify arbitrary relations, till, in New York harbor, these people have become human and comprehensible. Stevenson's interest in this process is not abstract. There is no generalizing talk about "the steerage" and "emigration" which does not reflect intimacy with particular individuals in the problem. Stevenson is not an expert in sociology; but he is never quite at fault in his theories. He limits himself largely to what he sees. His observations are human and artistic, not economic. Yet such economic questions as why the emigrant leaves home, what he expects to find in a new country, what typical incapacities have dislocated him and made him merely a part of the great western-setting tide, what energies of his nature drive him forward; all these matters are personally involved in this story of Stevenson's relations with his fellow passengers. No matter how many times the reader has crossed the ocean, and, looking down, or even descending daily, to the levels of the steerage, has thought of the problems that rise in that atmosphere, he will find that Stevenson has been there before him and seen them more sharply and more genuinely, not as facts of social science, but as personal experiences. For on the promenade deck your point of view will never lead to certain bits of wisdom which this unique opportunity of the steamship as a whole pre-

sents. Stevenson, looking from the second cabin, saw centrally what most of us see superficially. The lessons of the occasion were for him great and enduring lessons, while for us they are an amusement.

It furnished a complete little criticism of the world, that central second cabin, with the saloon passengers above and the steerage below. The higher man is autonymous; the lower so intimately bound up with his neighbors that he is at their mercy; neither is free. For Stevenson there was a lesson here that made him desire a new kind of citizenship in the world, a new freedom. In many ways this voyage was a philosophic preparation for the experiences he was now to undergo.

Landing in New York on a rainy Sunday, the eighteenth of August, and still clinging to the idea of seeing America from the emigrant's point of view, he spent the night in a lodging house by the docks, where he got not a minute's sleep; then all the next day he was pattering about in the rain on errands, and was so wet that when he finally went for his train in the evening he had to leave some of his clothes behind at the lodging house. Cabs and uptown hotels are not in vogue for emigrants, and the only inconsistency of his absurd conduct, as far as one can see, was to eat a large meal on Sunday night, with French coffee at the end, at a good restaurant. But this he partly justifies by saying, "I never entered into the feeling of Jack on land so completely as when I tasted that coffee."



## II

With the six big volumes of Bancroft's *History of the United States* in his traveling rug, he began his journey westward. *Across the Plains* is not a description of our country. It is a record of endurance and kindness, and an indirect description of the author in what was one of the most trying hardships of his life. The reason why it is so interesting is because of the common situations it describes. We have all stood in a jam at the ferry—and this scene with which the book opens is one of the most masterly things in all Stevenson's works; we have all suffered from the excessive heat and dust of travel; we have gone hours, and seemingly days, without a meal, owing to a wreck or a flood somewhere ahead on the line; we have been snubbed and roused to indignation by the conductor, or even perhaps by the newsboy; we have had our "words" at the desks of hotels; we have frothed over insults and unkindness; we have also had our amusements by the way, little pleasures over new names—and Stevenson, ever alive to the sound of things, was entranced with Susquehanna, Bellefontaine, and Sandusky, for America has surely outdone the world in this matter; we have wondered whether the Middle West were monotonous or beautiful, or, possibly, both—"a sort of flat paradise, not unfrequented by the devil," Stevenson decided; we have amused ourselves by declining to give our family history to the man sitting next to us; and we have

observed the marvelously patronizing, yet thoroughly agreeable, familiarity of the negro waiter at a railway restaurant. But, initiated by these vivid commonplaces into the atmosphere of a railway journey, the reader comes on much that is not so familiar: the herded life of the emigrants, the smells and foulness of the cars thirty years ago, the meanness or irresponsible loutishness of roughs, the sleeping boards and blankets, the orgy of the morning toilet under vile conditions, sickness, misery, ribaldry and laughter, endlessly intermingled in a few hundred cubic feet of fetid air, hour after hour, mile after mile.

Attached to the train of emigrants at Ogden was a carload of Chinese, by far the best behaved and cleanly of them all. But the Americans did not think so; they had for them only maledictions; they seemed to hate them *a priori*, and never seemed to have really looked at them or thought about them. "They declared them hideous vermin, and affected a kind of choking in the throat when they beheld them. Now, as a matter of fact, the young Chinese man is so like a large class of European women, that on raising my head and suddenly catching sight of one at a considerable distance, I have for an instant been deceived by the resemblance. I do not say it is the most attractive class of our women, but for all that many a man's wife is less pleasantly favoured. Again, my emigrants declared that the Chinese were dirty. I cannot say they were clean, for that was impossible upon the journey; but in

their efforts after cleanliness they put the rest of us to shame. We all pigged and stewed in one infamy, wet our hands and faces for half a minute daily on the platform, and were unashamed. But the Chinese never lost an opportunity, and you could see them washing their feet—an act not dreamed of among ourselves—and going as far as decency permitted to wash their whole bodies. I may remark by the way that the dirtier people are in their persons the more delicate is their sense of modesty. A clean man strips in a crowded boathouse; but he who is unwashed slinks in and out of bed without uncovering an inch of skin. Lastly, these very foul and malodorous Caucasians entertained the surprising illusion that it was the Chinese wagon and that alone which stank. I have said already that it was the exception and notably the freshest of the three.

“These judgments are typical of the feeling in all Western America. The Chinese are considered stupid, because they are imperfectly acquainted with English. They are held to be base, because their dexterity and frugality enable them to underbid the lazy, luxurious Caucasian. They are said to be thieves; I am sure they have no monopoly of that. They are called cruel; the Anglo-Saxon and the cheerful Irishman may each reflect before he bears the accusation. . . . I am told, again, that they are of the race of river pirates, and belong to the most despised and dangerous class in the Celestial Empire. But if this be so, what remarkable pirates

have we here! and what must be the virtues, the industry, the education, and the intelligence of their superiors at home!

"A while ago it was the Irish, now it is the Chinese that must go. Such is the cry. It seems, after all, that no country is bound to submit to immigration any more than to invasion; each is war to the knife, and resistance to either but legitimate defense. Yet we may regret the free tradition of the republic, which loved to depict herself with open arms, welcoming all unfortunates. And certainly, as a man who believed that he loves freedom, I may be excused some bitterness when I find her sacred name misused in the contention. It was but the other day that I heard a vulgar fellow in the Sand-lot, the popular tribune of San Francisco, roaring for arms and butchery. 'At the call of Abraham Lincoln,' said the orator, 'ye rose in the name of freedom to set free the negroes; can ye not rise and liberate yourselves from a few dirty Mongolians?' It exceeds the license of an Irishman to rebaptize our selfish interests by the name of virtue. . . .

"For my own part, I could not look but with wonder and respect on the Chinese. Their forefathers watched the stars before mine had begun to keep pigs. Gunpowder and printing, which the other day we imitated, and a school of manners which we never had the delicacy so much as to desire to imitate, were theirs in a long-past antiquity. They walk the earth with us, but it seems they must be of different clay. They hear the clock strike the

same hour, yet surely of a different epoch. They travel by steam conveyance, yet with such a baggage of old Asiatic thoughts and superstitions as might check the locomotive in its course. Whatever is thought within the circuit of the Great Wall; what the wry-eyed, spectacled schoolmaster teaches in the hamlets round Peking; religions so old that our language looks a halfling boy alongside; philosophy so wise that our best philosophers find things therein to wonder at; all this traveled alongside of me for thousands of miles over plain and mountain. Heaven knows if we had one common thought or fancy all that way, or whether our eyes, which yet were formed upon the same design, beheld the same world out of the railway windows. And when either of us turned his thoughts to home and childhood, what a strange dissimilarity must there not have been in these pictures of the mind—when I beheld that old, gray, castled city, high-throned above the firth, with the flag of Britain flying and the redcoat sentry pacing over all; and the man in the next car to me would conjure up some junks and a pagoda and a fort of porcelain, and call it, with the same affection, home.”—*Across the Plains*.

This car of Chinese gave Stevenson the text for a sermon that is really the moral of his whole journey. And in the spirit here expressed, including both love and knowledge of humanity, is the key to much in Stevenson's own character and in his experience later on. The red-hot socialist of Edin-

burgh University, the defender of despised races, the blood-brother and counselor of Island Kings, is nothing more frequently and genuinely than the Scotch lad who keeps a cheerful face in spite of sickness and continues a dozen little services among his neighbors everywhere on life's road. Of him you may read between the lines in all his books.

### III

Looking, as he was told, like a man at death's door, owing to a serious illness during the last few days of the journey, he arrived in San Francisco on August thirtieth. He found that Mrs. Osbourne was getting well; and then to save himself from a complete breakdown he went at once to camp out in the high soft air of the mountains above Monterey. To the work of making his own camp he was quite unequal. But two old frontiersmen on a goat ranch took him in and nursed him back to a semblance of health.

Though Stevenson had now a keen sense of how it really was with him, he again continued his literary work when he should have devoted himself to the serious business of resting. Speaking of these days in a letter to Edmund Gosse, he says "it was an odd, miserable piece of my life; and according to all rule, it should have been my death; but after a while my spirit got up again in a divine frenzy and has since kicked and spurred my vile body forward with great emphasis and success." This

whole American journey is a tale of conduct at once heroic and blindly foolish. On the *Devonia*, suffering from bad food and bad air and the general discomfort of the quarters he had chosen, he had written, in his "slantindicular cabin," "The Story of a Lie," which he sent to the *New Quarterly*, soon after his arrival in California. Besides this, he arranged his notes for *The Amateur Emigrant*, which he had half drafted by October, when he moved down from the ranch to Monterey. On the emigrant train he had of course eaten irregularly, slept on a board laid across the seats, breathed constantly the gases and bad air of the car, or, while they crawled over the prairies, he had perched on top of the cars—a position he found rather bad for writing; and not free from dirt. The heat was most of the time extreme. He says that he often wore nothing but a shirt and a pair of trousers, and never buttoned his shirt. Added to this kind of strain and exposure was the uncertainty of the quest on which he had come, and the feeling that he had alienated the affections of his parents. Throughout the winter in California he was quite unfit for work. Life in the open air and good food alone could have saved him from that "galloping consumption" on the verge of which he tells Gosse he had been during the winter.

In this situation, bordering more and more on the tragic, Stevenson yet felt that he must earn what he could by his pen and meanwhile practise the strictest economy. Till December he lived at

Monterey in the house of a French doctor, and seems to have had one square meal a day at Jules Simon-eau's restaurant, which he later came to regard, in his cheerful and romantic fashion, as the eating-place *par excellence* of the world. He worked steadily. In a letter to Colvin from San Francisco, January 10, 1880, he reports that he managed to write a good deal down at Monterey "when I was pretty sickly most of the time."

If you realize what the problematic nature of Stevenson's existence was in those months, and then turn to his poetical description of Monterey in "The Old Pacific Capital," and see what he wishes to record of that existence you will gain considerable insight into the cheerfulness of his character. The first paragraph, a description of the bay of Monterey, is quoted in all books of rhetoric for the enlightenment of college freshmen as a model of orderliness. But what follows is a poem, a lyrical echo of the sea beaches and the forest; and remembering Stevenson at Monterey you will feel both how intensely fond of life he was, and how superior to the conditions of life.

Besides the work already mentioned, he sent in October to Henley, for Stephen to print, "The Pavilion on the Links," a "grand carpentry story in nine chapters." He had also written in October eighty-three pages of a story called "A Vendetta in the West," which, with a number of others planned at this time, never matured. He was desperately worried about the financial aspect of his ventures



and fills his letters to Colvin with calculations. In January, 1880, he was working up his essays on Thoreau and Yoshida-Torajiro, and remaking an old play, Semiramis, into a novel, "The Forest State," ultimately to become *Prince Otto*.

All this time the possibility of death ran in his thoughts. In February it is probable that he wrote the "Requiem," destined to be the best known of his poems. To a letter to Colvin he appended a "Sketch of My Tomb," which contains two lines from the poem and the words, *nitor aquis*.

In March he was overcome with grief at the death of his landlord's little four-year-old child, whom he had helped tend during several nights. And soon he was himself almost at death's door, finally worn out with the intense strain of his complex situation. "I have been very sick," he wrote to Gosse, in the middle of April; "on the verge of a galloping consumption, cold sweats, prostrating attacks of cough, sinking fits in which I lost the power of speech, fever, and the ugliest circumstances of the disease; and I have cause to bless God, my wife that is to be, and one Doctor Bamford (a name the Muse repels), that I have come out of all this and got my feet once more upon a little hilltop, with a fair prospect of life and some new desire of living."

#### IV

Mrs. Osbourne, who was now fortunately free to see Stevenson, nursed him back to temporary

health. She had obtained her divorce, and though it was her wish to put off the marriage for a considerable time, the necessity of caring for Stevenson prevailed upon her. On May 19, 1880, the ceremony took place in the house of some friends in San Francisco. Stevenson never saw his wife's first husband, who shortly remarried, and who is supposed, after leaving his second wife, to have gone to South Africa. Stevenson's union with Fanny Van de Grift was, as he said, a marriage *in extremis*. But it proved his salvation in more ways than one. It was the immediate means of reuniting him to his family. For his wife soon won the hearts of his father and mother, and in the eight remaining years of Thomas Stevenson's life she was his great comfort. Thomas Stevenson had, some time before the marriage, seen his mistake in regard to his son's behavior and had cabled Louis to count on an allowance of two hundred and fifty pounds. Later he made his daughter-in-law promise to apply for further funds whenever she thought they were needed, any protests of her husband to the contrary notwithstanding.

Fanny Van de Grift was without question the wife for Stevenson. Of an equally vigorous and romantic nature, she was not given to fretting over the lack of conventional comfort in the changeful life they embarked on. She led a positive and enthusiastic existence beside him. She was his best encourager and his frankest critic; and if, like his other counselors, she was unable to give him a

strong sense of intellectual purpose and sequence during these crucial years, she never allowed the responsibilities of marriage to cramp his free and fluent moments. She saw clearly that he could not manage successfully work demanding great powers of endurance, and also that steady, patient work was apt neither to bring him inspiration nor to represent the quality in his temperament which counted most. Her continual response to the sporadic beginning of things that were never completed matched his own hopefulness, and did much to bring forth the ultimately successful experiment. Never does she appear to have damped his ardor for these ever-recurring fresh starts; and yet she possessed much of that critical sense of which Stevenson had so little—the instinct or energy which knows infallibly a great plan from a small one, which discards the impossible, which burns rubbish and does not merely sweep it into a corner. In the charming prefaces she has written for her husband's books she has unconsciously drawn her own portrait; and the reader who knows only her husband's beautiful verses to her and the facts of her life as his devoted helper, should see her more intimately. She is not alone the woman who nurses Stevenson through a dozen nearly fatal illnesses, who engages and prepares the cottage at Saranac Lake, who goes on ahead to San Francisco and charts the yacht for their South Sea voyage. Possessed of a simple and telling sanity, combined with a complete sympathy for her husband's whimsical and romantic humors, she is

also that rare kind of woman who is always friendly and always independent.

Immediately after the marriage, Stevenson, his wife, and his fourteen-year-old stepson, Lloyd Osbourne, went up into the mountains above Calistoga, some fifty miles north of San Francisco. *The Silverado Squatters* is the story of this honeymoon. It tells how they found a deserted mining camp on a ridge of St. Helena Mountain, how they cleaned the refuse out of one of the cabins and, after a fashion, made themselves at home there.

Stevenson seems to have been constitutionally unable to choose comfortable conditions for himself. Through life he more or less camped and roughed it. And a remarkable and typical thing about him is that he always remained utterly unable to cope with the practical difficulties of the kind of life he chose. He was what his wife calls "a handless man." He was hardly to be trusted with an ax, and he never learned to tie a knot that would hold. In his long experience ashore and afloat, in the midst of just such conditions as would seem inevitably to develop some ingenuity and handiness, he was consistently a lubber. Evidences of this abound in his own narratives of travel, a classic instance being the affair with Modeste's pack at the very start of his journey with her.

## V

On this aspect of his character the most interesting comment is the essay on Thoreau, which he had

just written in San Francisco before his marriage. Stevenson recognized in Thoreau a man in many ways his exact opposite. In all the little feats of skill in daily life Thoreau was letter-perfect. He lived by plan. He safeguarded himself by a series of negative precautions—"negative superiorities," Stevenson calls them. His pride was in perfecting small arrangements and in never disturbing them for greater opportunities. "He had no waste lands, nor kitchen-midden in his nature, but was all improved and sharpened to a point." "He was almost shockingly devoid of weaknesses; he had not enough of them to be truly polar with humanity." For Stevenson, meagerness and abstinence were not human virtues. Thoreau, living in his cabin by Walden Pond, despising comfort, defiant of custom, caring most for high thoughts and less for material success, was, like Stevenson, anticonventional. But Thoreau was also antisocial; he was not congenial in his eccentricities; he was aloof and freakish. He feared "the bracing contact with the world." Stevenson is the congenial Bohemian. He seems never to have learned to do anything but conversation and "style," the latter of which he has by now described as "the essence of thinking"; but his daily life, if a trifle slouchy, was open and radiant. He had never decided "to lead a life of self-improvement," and his egotism was not, like Thoreau's, self-centered. Stevenson's egotism makes always a charming paradox.

On the other hand, the essay shows Stevenson's admiration for the challenge that Thoreau threw

down to society, the romanticist's challenge of the doctrine of Success. What Stevenson expresses by his whole warm, varied life and labor, Thoreau puts into a specially maintained attitude, and into the aphorisms of his marvelously incisive intellect. "The cost of a thing is *the amount of what I will call life* which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run." Stevenson says that he has been accustomed to put this to himself a little more clearly, "that the price we have to pay for money is paid in liberty." And he adds that whether we can afford a thousand a year, a two thousand, or a ten thousand a year livelihood, is entirely a matter of taste; "it is not in the least degree a question of duty, though commonly supposed so." The two men are together here, and when Thoreau says, "I am convinced that *to maintain oneself on this earth is not a hardship, but a pastime, if we will live simply and wisely; as the pursuits of simpler nations are still the sports of the more artificial*"—does not this exactly express what Stevenson was learning at Silverado and what he was to learn more thoroughly as a pioneer in the South Seas?

Much of the charm of all the essays in *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*, many of which he had written by this time, lies in their representation of his own personality. He is never dully objective. Through his warm sympathies or his sincere antagonisms the characters he treats of are revealed just as men are revealed to us in real life. He seems al-

ways to belong to the company of men about whom he writes. You can easily imagine him visiting Thoreau by Walden Pond. They would have understood each other perfectly—and disagreed. He was enough of a tramp to know Villon's soul, its gleeful unrespectability and its impudent satisfactions, and enough of an aristocrat to understand its saving grace of scorn. You will perhaps learn more of Burns in his essay on the famous love affairs than anywhere else. It is at the beginning of the essay on Burns that he states his theory of human understanding. "To write with authority about another man we must have fellow-feeling and some common ground of experience with our subject. We may praise or blame according as we find him related to us by the best or worst in ourselves; but it is only in virtue of some relationship that we can be his judges, even to condemn. Feelings which we share and understand enter for us into the tissue of the man's character; those to which we are strangers in our own experience we are inclined to regard as blots, exceptions, inconsistencies and excursions of the diabolic; we conceive them with repugnance, explain them with difficulty, and raise our hands to heaven in wonder when we find them in conjunction with talents that we respect or virtues that we admire."—"Some Aspects of Robert Burns," *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*.

This is the reason why such different men as Pepys and Walt Whitman and Charles of Orleans

are open books to him. He knew their characters through his own, as it is given few critics of the intellect to know; and this gift of sympathy would have made him one of the great biographers had he so chosen and persisted. For my own part I regret that he did not so choose. I would gladly forego a few of his Wreckers and Prince Ottos for that projected life of Hazlitt (it was even contracted for<sup>1</sup>) which he never wrote. For he understood the art of describing greatness, personally and intimately, not by any literary dexterity, but by letting it enter into the tissue of his own character. He understood how the acts of greatness, the world over, are interrelated, though seas appear to flow between them. For like all men of wide sympathy, he lived in the midst of their influence and focused some part of it in his own valiant mind. Speaking of Yoshida-Torajiro and other Japanese reformers, he says: "It is exhilarating to have lived in the same days with these great-hearted gentlemen. Only a few miles from us, to speak by the proportion of the universe, while I was droning over my lessons, Yoshida was goading himself to be wakeful with the stings of the mosquito; and while you were grudging a penny income tax, Kusákabé was stepping to death with a noble sentence on his lips." There is no more genuine fiber in Stevenson than this sense of the romance which the great deeds of others give to our smaller lives.

Do you wonder that Fanny Van de Grift wished

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<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, II, p. 76.



to cast her lot with his and to rescue him from death's door? Sick as he was, his high spirit, which you may see in this essay on Yoshida-Torajiro, written in the midst of his illness, belied the sorry facts and refused to let them dominate.

## VI

From May until the end of July, 1880, except for a few weeks when the party were forced to return to Calistoga, owing to a light attack of diphtheria with which Mrs. Stevenson and Lloyd came down, they occupied the Silverado mine. Stevenson's interests while there were very quiet. He was much too ill to take an active part in life, but his impressions served amply for a pleasant book. The owner of the Silverado Hotel, Rufe Hanson, whose portrait is really a very considerable performance, Kelmar, the Jew trader, and the few people who penetrated into this mountain recess, form the mainstay of the narrative. The description of the arrival and departure of the daily stage-coach, the history of the mine, a typical Stevensonian disquisition on the sea fogs that rolled up the mountainside, and such incidental matters, make the setting. Stevenson does not become a woodland philosopher. Even the esthetics which had served him for a motive in "Forest Notes" and "Fontainebleau" is absent from *Silverado Squatters*. But on closing the little book you have looked at a strange new corner of nature and known its vivid charm.

The first of August saw the party on their way to New York. When they arrived in Glasgow, August seventeenth, Stevenson's parents and Sidney Colvin were on the dock to meet them.

The first part of the Great Adventure was over. It had meant for Stevenson many vital experiences and the development of a wisdom that sets the tone of his most serious later work. It had marked the culmination of his long misunderstanding with his father. It had settled him in his craft of literature. It had led him to look at the world from an unusual and invaluable point of view. It had given him his life's chief happiness. And in all this there had been for him both a victory and a defeat. For he could not have put the thing through single-handed. Without the care of the wife he set out to win, and without the final generosity of his father the adventure might well have been all misadventure. But if it involved the serious damaging of Stevenson's health, it had also brought him a means for safeguarding the slim remainder; and Stevenson, keeping his mind not on the defeat, but on what was left to him, turned that little year by year into victory.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ILL HEALTH AND AMBITION

#### I

**T**HE reunion with his family was a deep satisfaction, the more so since it was directly a part of the blessing of his marriage. It strengthened his nerves for the definite struggle with sickness which now lasted almost without intermission until he returned to America in 1888. In Edinburgh he was told by Doctor Balfour that the seriously diseased condition of his throat and lungs would make it necessary for him to seek the high air of Switzerland at once. So, with his wife and Lloyd he arrived at Davos Platz early in November, 1880.

In many important respects this first winter at Davos marks the beginning of a new phase in Stevenson's life and literary development. For seven years he had been a restless vagabond. He had been full of changing experiences, and had written on this or that topic, as it had presented itself. He had not exercised himself in steady labor on some one thing that required a continually renewed comprehension of the whole, especially of

the relation of each gradual phase to a well-understood end. All his productions had been short and, so to speak, casual. His unity of purpose was, like a poet's, the expression of his own temperament apropos of a great variety of interests. He had undertaken no work longer than *An Inland Voyage*, a book of some two hundred pages. Now, for the next eight years, he was enforced, so far as he could be, to settle down at various health resorts, Davos, Hyères, Bournemouth, Saranac, to an outwardly regular life, and though he was inwardly ever the same R. L. S. of roving disposition, a natural change occurred in his temperament as a writer. He became less interested in recording his own immediate pursuits, and, after a few papers on life at Davos, he was apt to seek tasks requiring longer attention and more objective enthusiasms.

And herein lies what seems to me the tragedy of Stevenson's literary career—for even the most successful author may have his tragedy. It is a matter to be taken up in more detail later; but it may now be briefly pointed out that at just the time when Stevenson's maturing purposes naturally tempted him on to try his hand at long books, he began to lack essential qualities for their construction—endurance and evenness of mood. By a struggle he again and again reached the end of a three or four hundred page story; but the struggle shows; and the end is often not *the* end, but only an end. This I take to be obvious on a second reading of *Prince Otto*, *Catriona*, *The Master*, *The Wrecker*, and

*St. Ives.* It may be said with a fair approach to the truth that the best of Stevenson is always short, and the weakest long; and it makes a most convincing evidence, in the conflict between his health and his genius, of the handicap under which he worked. He wished to be a writer of romances; and it is to be laid very largely to his health that his genius, as that is now seen, was in the essays, the tales, and moral fables, and not in the romances. A tale like *The Merry Men* or certain pages of *Kidnapped*, or the start of *Treasure Island*, makes one feel that he was equal to anything. One is astounded that after certain chapters or passages, he could not put it through, that invention should flag, sequence fail, and the whole thing shortly lack the sweep, the strong hand of a master. Comparing him to Scott and Dumas, Mr. Copeland has said: "He would not, if he could, have written like them; he could not, if he would, have imagined and invented and swung the whole thing along as they did. They with all their faults, are great romantics; he, with all his gifts and graces, is a little romantic; and the many well-meaning persons who range him persistently with Scott do him nothing but disservice."

Even supposing other things had been equal, Stevenson had not the health for the great books—look at his picture and then look at those of Scott and Dumas. But Stevenson was a little romantic not only because he lacked physical energy, but because his peculiar nervous temperament, his rapid enthusiasms, forbade him to regulate and to pre-

serve what energy he had. In this respect his friend, John Addington Symonds, makes a most interesting contrast to him. A much sicker man than Stevenson although normally possessed of a little more bodily vigor, Symonds brought to bear on one of the very greatest of literary tasks a regulated persistence as well as his supreme literary skill. But in his own case Stevenson could not reconcile the two qualities. He remarked of Symonds, whom he met on arriving at Davos in November, that he was "much of an invalid in mind and character." Symonds, who died in the year before Stevenson, had planned and was seeing through to completion the seven volumes of the *Renaissance in Italy*, a monumental work that shows effort of a kind beyond Stevenson's capability.

It is doubtful if Stevenson really appreciated the value of the qualities he lacked. Eight years later, when he began to revive at Saranac after a long series of complete prostrations, his physician, Doctor Trudeau, took him into his laboratory to show him some of the experiments that he had been making year by year in his lifelong study of tuberculosis. Doctor Trudeau, himself a victim of the disease, who had for years lived at Saranac and with the utmost patience, in the face of almost overwhelming difficulty, was then beginning to make those practical discoveries which have placed him among the great benefactors of mankind,<sup>1</sup> could yet

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Edward L. Trudeau went to the Adirondacks in the same year in which Stevenson had been "ordered south," 1873. In 1884 he founded at Saranac Lake the Adirondack Cottage Sanitarium, the first American institution attempting climatic

gain little sympathetic interest from Stevenson. The romance of such labor in science was beyond the comprehension of the writer of tales. Incurable as ever, Stevenson consented to make but a humorous comment: "Well, Trudeau, your lamp may be very brilliant, but it smells to me too much of oil."

Now to write long romances without oil has never been done. Stevenson, trying it, failed most of the time. For it was the irony of his temperament that just the steady flame, seemingly so incompatible with his brilliance at its best, was the one requisite to carry out the sort of work he was henceforth always embarking on.

But given his temperament, and we must remember that it is for this we read Stevenson and this which he was chiefly intent on expressing, it is doubtful whether he could have done better than he did by scrupulous attention to his "case," and by cautious regular expenditure of his energy. Like most affairs in invalidism, the matter is paradoxical. A few things are certain, however. He carried his objection to "cowardly and prudential maxims" a trifle too far. He never allowed himself to be an exception to his own doctrine and the result was that as an invalid he was never a success. For, if

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and open air treatment of pulmonary diseases. In 1894, the year of Stevenson's death, Doctor Trudeau founded the Saranac Laboratory for the Study of Tuberculosis, the first research laboratory for the purpose in America. The prolongation of his own life is, as I write, a marvelous tribute to the science which he helped to inaugurate.

he tried religiously now and again to start on the road toward becoming a cure, he was almost certain to upset all he had gained by an unwise, though always generous-minded, bit of conduct. What had appeared to his physicians as by no means a dangerous condition became shortly a most dangerous one; and until Stevenson discovered in 1888, in the South Pacific, a climate where his random ways of life and lack of foresight were not ruinous, he was never in as good condition as, with steady regular care, he might well have been. The story of these years, as told in his letters and in Balfour's *Life*, will appear to even the casual observer a series of mistakes. That Stevenson turned out an immense amount of literary work meanwhile does not blind one to this fact. Precautions which even a comparatively robust case should have taken scrupulously, Stevenson, weighing little more than one hundred pounds, nervous and sensitive to every wind that blew, continually neglected, or found himself forced by circumstances to neglect.

## II

Thus, after the first winter in Davos, where he had been steadily improving, he returned in April to France and Scotland against his physician's orders. Mrs. Stevenson had found the elevation of Davos very uncongenial. After the second winter, during which she was ill, he therefore returned to Scotland again. All the good of two seasons was



undone. Stevenson spent the summer in miserable health, and the story of the following winter on the Riviera illustrates at once the folly and the bravery of his behavior. His cousin Bob took him to Marseilles in September, 1882. At the time, he was fully resolved to exert every effort toward recovery and had made up his mind to keep out of England for at least three years. But everything went wrong. He chose a bad locality near Marseilles, began to have hemorrhages, and fled to Nice. For a week, his wife, who had lacked ready money to close the villa and follow him, received no word of his arrival and was completely at sea as to his whereabouts. She has told the tale in a remarkable letter to John Addington Symonds included in Sir Sidney Colvin's collection. Like Shelley, Stevenson had the ability of genius for getting into peculiar situations that kept him temperamentally stirred up, though not as a result of his opinions, but usually rather because of the condition of his wardrobe or of his failure to have enough money on hand to remove the suspicions of some landlord. This particular episode was followed by a return to Marseilles in order to sublet their villa, a second visit to Nice and a final settling down at the end of March, 1883, at Hyères in Châlet La Solitude. Here for nine months things went comparatively well, and Stevenson recorded later that he was happier than at any other time in his life. The air on this part of the Riviera has an unequalled refreshing mellowness, except during a month or two in the summer, which

Stevenson spent at Royat. The scenery is among the most varied and beautiful in Europe. Stevenson's phrase, "a garden like a fairy story and a view like a classical landscape," seems to sum it up.

This interim of good health lasted until January, 1884, when he had the most serious illness of his life, and from the effects of which he can hardly be said to have ever recovered. At all events, it began a series of attacks which lasted steadily till four years later at Saranac. Charles Baxter and W. E. Henley had come for a visit, and because La Solitude was too small for comfort, the Stevensons went with them to Nice. There Louis came down with acute congestion of the lungs and kidneys. His life was despaired of. But Bob Stevenson arrived from Paris and did wonders in keeping up the sick man's spirits as well as those of his wife. After they returned to La Solitude in February, Stevenson had only a few weeks' respite before he was again at death's door. The immediate occasion of this attack seems to have been a bonfire celebration in his garden over the indictment for libel of a certain London editor. With their devoted French servant, Valentine Roch, the Stevensons danced about the fire in the cold night air. The next day Louis was ill with sciatica followed by a violent hemorrhage. At just this time an epidemic of Egyptian ophthalmia broke out in the locality. He contracted it, and now lay in a darkened room, with a bandage over his eyes, sciatica racking his limbs, and his right arm bound to his side as a precaution against another

hemorrhage. His frame of mind under these conditions his wife has recorded in the preface of *The Dynamiter*. Thoroughly discouraged by finding that she could not read to him in the darkened room, she remarked ironically that she supposed he would regard even this as for the best. Stevenson replied that it was just what he was about to say. But genius and Providence turn everything to account. Mrs. Stevenson amused her husband by telling him stories. *The Dynamiter*, their joint work, had its origin in this sick-room.

After this illness, the Riviera became so dangerous from an epidemic of cholera that the Stevensons, abandoning their good resolution to live in a climate advantageous to Louis's disease, started by slow stages for England, and took up quarters at the end of July, 1884, at Richmond. Another reason for this step was the serious condition of his father's health. Moving in September to Bournemouth on the Channel, where the air is often soft, though damp, they lived in lodgings till April, 1885, and then, till August, 1887, in the house they called Skerryvore, a gift from Thomas Stevenson to his daughter-in-law. During these three years in England Stevenson was forced by continued illness to lead a very careful existence. His letters record a succession of colds, "hoasts," "thundering influenzas," "liver and slight bleeding," hemorrhage, fever, chills, and gloom—often in the gayest manner. Housed or in bed a large part of the time, "old, and fagged, and chary of speech," not talking

aloud, in fact, except for a few hours of an evening, he was still able to continue his literary work, as he had done at Davos and Hyères. So positive an energy is the will to write.

But this state of affairs could not have continued much longer, and after his father's death in May, 1887, it was decided to see what certain American resorts would do for him. With his mother and Valentine Roch, the party reached New York in September. As before, he had felt benefit from the voyage. But while his wife hastened to Saranac to engage a house, he became ill at Newport where he had gone to visit the Fairchilds. From the first of October until April of the following year he was at Saranac in the care of Doctor Trudeau. It is an interesting fact that Doctor Trudeau found in Stevenson no signs of actual tuberculosis.<sup>1</sup> His disease of the lungs and throat had probably been of the fibroid type and was continued, not by the inroads of the tubercular bacillus, but by erosion of old scars and congestions from other causes. As all readers of Mr. Balfour's *Life* know, Stevenson did not die of consumption, but of a suffusion of blood in his brain. It may be said with all likelihood of truth that a few years of continuous careful regimen at Davos, or on the Riviera, or at Saranac, would long before have so improved his condition that the terrible experiences of the years from 1880 to 1888 could have been avoided. To their weaken-

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<sup>1</sup> According to Doctor Trudeau's personal statement to the writer.

ing effect and perhaps to inheritance, his death six years later seems to have been due.

The winter at Saranac was the beginning of this new, though short, lease of life; and when he left there in April it was with sufficient energy to undertake the journey to California and to embark on the South Sea cruise.

These are the main facts of Stevenson's long illness. I have detailed them thus at length, for they are the background of his life and of his work. They are in the texture of his philosophy.

It was during this period that he wrote most of the books by which he is now known; and I shall give a list of them here to accompany the facts of his illness, for the two together constitute the miracle of his career. At Davos and in Scotland, November, 1880, to September, 1882, he had written *The Merry Men*, "Thrawn Janet," "The Body Snatcher," the essays on "Pepys," "Talks and Talkers" and several other papers, *The Silverado Squatters*, "The Treasure of Franchard" and *Treasure Island*. He had seen through the press with all the labor of proof correcting, *Virginibus Puerisque*, *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*, and *New Arabian Nights* in two volumes. At Hyères, March, 1883, to June, 1884 (and please recollect the circumstances of those sixteen months), he had been at work on *The Black Arrow*, printed in *Young Folks'* during the summer of 1883, *Prince Otto*, some of the poems in *Underwoods'* and *A Child's Garden of Verses*, and several of his most charming essays, such as "A Penny

Plain" and "The Character of Dogs." On January first, 1884, he boasted of a total of four hundred and sixty-five pounds, no shillings, sixpence for the past twelve months. At Bournemouth, July, 1884, to September, 1887, he had written *More New Arabian Nights*, "Markheim," "Ollala," *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Kidnapped*, *Memoir of Fleeming Jenkin*, and many essays, among them "Pastoral" and "The Manse," included in *Memories and Portraits* which he saw through the press after reaching America. *Prince Otto*, *A Child's Garden of Verses*, and the volume called *The Merry Men and Other Tales* were also published during this period. At Saranac, October, 1887, to April, 1888, he was writing monthly articles for *Scribner's Magazine* and starting *The Master of Ballantrae*, which ran in *Scribner's Magazine* from November, 1888, to October, 1889.<sup>1</sup> He wrote these things, as he has said, in bed and out of it, in hemorrhages, in sickness, when torn by coughing and when his head swam for weakness. Had he not, for so long, "won his wager and recovered his glove?"

### III

There are, however, so many different views of the relation of genius and its ambitions to ill health that it may be well to make certain further qualifi-

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<sup>1</sup> For a nearly complete list of Stevenson's writings, see Balfour's *Life*, Vol. II, Appendix F. See also the very interesting and complete *Bibliography* of the works of Robert Louis Stevenson, by Col. W. F. Prideaux, C. S. I.

cations for Stevenson's case. It is said, for example, that a disease of the lungs is not always a depressing disease, and that in fact it is sometimes stimulating. This is true; but that it added stimulation to Stevenson's normal genius is unlikely. And there are, in this connection, several fallacies, medical and sentimental, which it is well to avoid.

First, Stevenson does not belong in any possible list of those men whose originality appears to have some source in their physical and mental defects, whose creative power seems to result from a certain degenerate sensitiveness. For while it is true that many artists have suffered, like millions of people not artists, from some undermining disease or habit, very few have found out their artistic capabilities through the action of ill health, or in the excitement produced, let us say, by alcohol. After a careful sifting of much evidence in this matter, there appears to the writer little warrant for connecting casually the artistic nature with the unsound body. In the face of a thousand healthy exceptions, no such theory, if proposed, is really tenable. On the other hand, it is, of course, equally impossible to say that health is a fundamental condition of art; and such a theory, if proposed, would be untenable in the face of significant exceptions. All one can assert is that *the sort of health which means nervous energy* is usually necessary to any sustained artistic effort and that the artistic temperament has usually been born and bred in that sort of health, whatever circumstances later surround it.

Secondly, it is sometimes pointed out that it is not invariably harder or more heroic for the unhealthy man to do literary work than for the healthy, since the limitations imposed by invalidism, if it is not some form of nervous exhaustion, often serve but to increase a man's devotion to the one interest remaining to him. Now it is true that art is mistress, that a man does not so naturally incline to give up writing as he might a business or a profession for ill health; and in this sense ill health may have occasionally benefited the world by increasing the leisure of an author who previously was full of other duties. But it could hardly help the quality of his work. It could hardly increase the number of those authors whom Carlyle wished to pay for what they had not written. And to this case Stevenson is no exception. He wrote too much. Like every earnest modern author he wrote for money. No one who loves and knows him would dream of excusing him, on the ground of his invalidism, by saying that at all events he did his best. The words would be curiously ironical. His *best* is of the very finest and brooks no such condescension; but he wrote a great deal in those hours of suffering that could not be his best, and he persisted doggedly in putting it forth along with the other and sometimes in believing it worthy. So easily is the will to write led into temptation. In brief, it is probable that his health so limited other activities that he devoted more of his energy to writing than was good for his art. In his paradoxical case—and the case of the



invalid is, as we have remarked, often a paradox—the energy which was necessary to produce his art at all somewhat weakened its quality. If he often worked with great skill in the face of weariness and sickness he was probably supported not so much by moral fortitude as by that peculiar nervous ardor which literary labor develops; and thus he was led into the temptation to write under circumstances when the vision of his purpose grew vague, grew to be a sort of whimsical license to ramble hither and thither, instead of a definite and inspiring guide.

Thirdly, we must not imagine Stevenson to be one of those natures whom disease hardens, who go with gritted teeth to their tasks. For the wonderful thing about his character was his ability to escape the cankerous effects of sickness and to retain his enthusiasms near at hand. The positive idea to realize is that Stevenson, like most sensitive and enthusiastic natures, enjoyed getting as much action or emotion, or what people call *interest*, out of the circumstances of his life as he possibly could. So he liked to exaggerate, as a satirist likes to ridicule, for the sake of appreciating a certain aspect of a thing more sharply. He exaggerated now his woes and now his sense of superiority to them, in order to profit doubly in his own esteem. Who has not done this? But who has succeeded so well as Stevenson in painting a picture of his troubles, at once painfully vivid and positively cheerful? Stevenson had undoubtedly a glorious capacity for trouble. It never dwarfed, though I believe it somewhat

diffused, his character. It is in this respect that he is different from most men. Trouble for most men is thoroughly troublesome, and little else. It does not transmute itself into anything positive, anything, at least, which does not savor of martyrdom and self-sacrifice or of self-satisfactions of a negative order. Stevenson is always high on the positive side of life. His sharpest satire has the rare quality of being always constructive; and so fearful was he of destroying any of the positive illusions of youth that he withheld from publication that essay, printed only the other day, on "The Choice of a Profession"—an essay which any one, hoping to do anything positive in art in this commercialized age, would do well to read forthwith.

Finally then, in view of the facts and opinions just cited, it would appear to make little difference whether one believes with such a critic as Mr. Frank Swinnerton that Stevenson's "peculiar nervous brilliance" is partly due to his delicate health, as it undoubtedly was, or whether one prefers to say that genius is so positive an energy that it can always transform a certain amount of sickness and irritation into fuel for its purposes. Neither statement greatly affects the central fact, the extraordinary will to write which Stevenson at all times displayed. Nor does it affect the unforgettable lesson of this whole matter, the close relationship in Stevenson of character and genius as expressed by this will to write. It is sheer sophistry to argue on the one hand that courage is shown only by the author who

labors in the face of sharp physical pain, or on the other that genius requires no support from courage. Let us repeat that Stevenson's genius and his courage were, like the moral doctrine that he derived from them, continually combined in positive action. His courage lay not in outfacing obstacles, but in being cheerful under ordinary circumstances. In the face of obstacles most of us can assume some sort of grin and play-act a noble part for the moment. Doubtless, kind friends, who for the rest of the time are bored to death with glumness, will tell us that in such moments our real character comes out. If this were true, we had better seek trouble daily. But Stevenson preaches a saner doctrine—the cultivation of a positive, not a latent courage, a courage which is effective in the face of three meals to-day, and the funeral baked meats to-morrow. It is, more especially, a courage that creates its own adventures, even with a touch of whimsical bravado after the manner of Don Quixote, Stevenson's confessed prototype.

Therefore, the important point to perceive in connection with the facts of Stevenson's health is that though the character of his work was harmed by his health, it is mainly in the form, the coherence of certain books, rarely in the tone or in the outlook on life of the writer. Above the ills of these years, recorded now humorously and now as mere family news in the letters of Sir Sidney Colvin's second volume, the spirit of Stevenson sails indomitable. So it seemed to the friends at his bedside,

and so it seems to us in reading the books he then wrote. How great was this achievement, and how noble the energy that accomplished it is a thought not to be discounted in any impersonal estimate, like that which follows, of his books as works of art.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE SPIRIT OF ROMANCE

#### I

**O**NE of the changes that comes over the character of Stevenson's work with his confinement by ill health is, as we have remarked, a diminution of the autobiographic temper. Until 1880 he had largely concerned himself with his personal experiences and opinions. Until 1880 one might construct from his writings an account, almost year by year, of his employments and purposes. But after 1880 this would no longer be possible. Except for a few sketches of life at Davos and his journal of South Sea cruises, the record is as indirect as that in the novels and essays of Thackeray.

I say indirect, for I would not imply that Stevenson stopped talking of himself. He was still intent on painting life in the colors of his own mind and he never made the mistake of trying to depersonalize his style or to eliminate his own character from the atmosphere of his books. But when Stevenson took to writing romances, it means, first, that he blended his feelings, his experience, his philosophy, with more objective purposes and, second, that he was

forming literary ambitions independent of his own comings and goings which he could hardly regard during those eight years of illness from 1880 to 1888 as matter to his hand. It did not mean that Stevenson began to write about the external world of the novels of society. His realism is all of his own making. Like the romantic poet, he has a world about him that is his own, and fiction is his more diffuse mode of self-expression, or of self-entertainment, during his long period of bad weather.

## II

A romance is primarily a flight of fancy. It is in this sense a very personal matter and yet not always personally controllable. It is something like a dream. It takes on its local color, not from corresponding accurately to any corner of the real world, but from being spun out of the author's pure imagination. The author of romances must be true primarily to himself, to the inner actuality of his mind. He must be ruled by the habits of his fancy and not too much by the facts of the outer world. In telling a story he is as much like one trying to recall a vision as he is like one telling what he has seen with his own eyes. Stevenson's romantic stories have this peculiar texture. They have the sound of stories told out of a dream. There is a marvelous unreality which is yet in no respect a falseness and which one accepts in place of reality

without looking back. Setting, action, sequence, motive, dénouement, the whole fabrication in such stories as *The Merry Men*, *Dr. Jekyll*, "The Pavilion on the Links," or even *The Master of Ballantrae*, is a piece of transcendent make-believe. It is, in fact, very much like Stevenson himself—the child who had told wonder-tales all day long, who had played endless games of "supposing" alone in the corners of his father's house, and who had kept on playing all his life.

In Stevenson's letters and in his essays on his own disposition as a writer of romances, he has pretty well explained himself. So, in his romances themselves, we are prepared to see a man who has long been enlarging the place of his imagination and who now continues to do this in maturity, not as a novelist ordinarily does by peopling his imagination with realities and by letting in as much of the light of day as he can command, but rather by finding out the strange beings who are, so to speak, already living behind the shadows of that unexplored and inexhaustible region. To preserve the shadows, to preserve the zest of their exploration, to keep the whole adventure in the atmosphere of its original occurrence in fancy and never to let it issue into the raw air of actuality, is the Stevensonian purpose. It had been the unconscious purpose of little R. L. S. in child's play.

Stevenson was never a realist in the narrow sense of the word. The young man who carried his notebook in his pocket and who spent hours studying

"at first hand" in the forest of Fontainebleau or along the rocks at Anstruther was also intent on making over the object that it might better accord with his dreams; and it is entirely characteristic that, as he began to write romances, he should also proceed, in various essays and letters, to warn against the so-called realistic school as dangerous and baneful. "The danger is lest, in seeking to draw the normal, a man should draw the dull, and write the novel of society instead of the romance of man." The essays called "Lantern Bearers," "A Novel of Dumas's," "A Humble Remonstrance," "Penny Plain," "A Note on Realism," all but one written during these years at Davos and Hyères, where he was also writing his first long stories, are his emphatic insistence on the half-shut eye against "the dazzle and confusion of reality," as the artistic method *par excellence*, whether a man "reasons or creates."

Truth exists within the mind. Realism, as a purpose in literature, only pretends that it exists exclusively without. Truth is what one aims at in all art. Realism is only a technical fidelity to the external world which leads a writer to seek therein something other than the beautiful. Impersonality in art is but half-truth. It is always possible that mere truth of fact may be truth without charm. Charm and beauty are the positive, the personal virtues of artistic insight; dulness and ugliness are the negative and impersonal qualities of things themselves. For a man of romantic imagination, life untinged



with beauty is not life-like. What we look for in a book, says Stevenson, is some projection of the author. Charm is a personal emanation—"the one excuse and breath of art." So in his narratives, as in other writings, it is always Stevenson's intention to weave a spell of style and to capture the mind by fancy. This practise leads him to say emphatically that "true realism, always and everywhere, is that of the poet's."

If a romance is a flight of poetic fancy, it must lead to a place somewhat removed from the world—and one is inclined to add that this is the romanticist's notion about any piece of reading worthy of the name. A book is a place by itself. It is not just a mirror of the world. It is like something in life, maybe; but it is not merely a part of life. It is another, an additional, resort. We know our way round in its geography, not because of our experience in the outer world, but because we have, each of us in our heads, a small tract of the same enchanted region from which to explore further. From this the writer of romances starts and soon emerges, one can hardly tell how, into his special country. Strange colors play over the landscape. The vestiges of logic disappear and are not regretted; the sights and sounds of the place can be at once less real and more vivid than those of life, just as the sensations of a dream are more vivid than those of any given waking moment; and though memory refuses to divulge them accurately to consciousness, they somehow retain a glamorous bril-

liance and a far suggestion to which reality has no parallel.

Yet it is all so *true*. For this place is the creation of a strong sense within us for what is fitting as distinguished from what merely is. On the earth are places full of actual deeds and memories. But the deeds might often as naturally have occurred elsewhere, and the memories usually haunt the place only by that sort of accident which makes up the realism of an arbitrary world. In the enchanted region of romance, the longing for fitness is always being satisfied. There, as Stevenson has suggested, if certain dank gardens cry aloud for murder, the murder is properly committed; and seacoasts set apart for shipwreck do not wait long for the event. According to the laws of romance, which are the laws of fitness and not of logic and morals, true reality consists in having all these things fit together as they should, in bringing about "the marking incident" at just the proper time, and in making "all the circumstances of the tale answer one to another like notes in music." Obviously the fascination of this country of romance is not in the characters and consciences and morals that are developed there, but in the likely adventures of the place, and also especially in the fact that we are the adventurers. "Something happens as we desire to have it happen to ourselves; some situation, that we have long dallied with in fancy, is realized in the story with enticing and appropriate details. Then we forget the characters; then we push the hero

aside; then we plunge into the tale in our own person and bathe in fresh experience; and then, and then only, do we say that we have been reading a romance."—"A Gossip on Romance," *Memories and Portraits*.

It was no doubt so that things had happened in Skeltdom, and, for a true reader like Stevenson, would happen anywhere in story books. "What am I? What are life, art, letters, the world, but what my Skelt has made them? He stamped himself upon my immaturity. The world was plain before I knew him, a poor penny world; but soon it was all coloured with romance."—"A Penny Plain," *Memories and Portraits*.

To understand this, one must certainly know how to read—or rather to listen, for a romance is listened to, rather than read. It is the tone of the thing that counts most. The reader must surrender himself utterly. Criticism of a romance and of the romantic temper by one who has never read as, for example, Stevenson himself read, would be pretty nearly worthless; it may be nearly worthless in any case. But I believe that the best criticism of Stevenson's tales is in such pictures as he draws of his evenings with some favorite book like the *Vicomte de Bragelonne*. "I would return in the early night," he says, "from one of my patrols with the shepherd (John Todd); a friendly face would meet me in the door, a friendly retriever scurry up-stairs to

fetch my slippers; and I would sit down with the Vicomte for a long, silent, solitary lamplight evening by the fire. And yet I know not why I call it silent, when it was enlivened with such a clatter of horse-shoes, and such a rattle of musketry, and such a stir of talk; or why I call those evenings solitary in which I gained so many friends. I would rise from my book and pull the blind aside, and see the snow and the glittering hollies chequer a Scotch garden, and the winter moonlight brighten the white hills. Thence I would turn again to that crowded and sunny field of life in which it was so easy to forget myself, my cares, and my surroundings; a place busy as a city, bright as a theatre, thronged with memorable faces, and sounding with delightful speech. I carried the thread of that epic into my slumbers, I woke with it unbroken, I rejoiced to plunge into the book again at breakfast, it was with a pang that I must lay it down and turn to my own labours."—"A Novel of Dumas's," *Memories and Portraits*.

The long romance is of all books the most enthralling and the most companionable, and it was not for nothing that Stevenson understood so instinctively its fascination. When all the weaknesses in his own fabrications have been pointed out, traced to his bad health or to his supposed purposelessness, it still remains that his books and even his fragments of books, make marvelous reading for those not too much concerned with getting some-

where. If, like the stories one tells to children, or like the adventures one has in dreams, they do not often work out very inevitably; if they fade or merely stop; if the sequence of adventures is decidedly haphazard, and the characters for a large part of the time do not appear to be much beyond their clothes and a quaint phrase or two; yet each incident, while it lasts, is enthralling; the situation and the scenery are ever in accord; and the reader has always been for the time being in the country of his own imagination.

### III

This much is true for nearly any of Stevenson's books, especially if read at the same age at which Scott and Dumas are most appreciated. But a great deal more can be said for two or three; and for *Treasure Island*, though confessedly a tale written much at random, there is more to say than any matter-of-fact tongue can possibly speak.<sup>1</sup>

I can well remember the first time I read that almost perfect yarn. I was twenty-five years old. I had somehow missed it in my boyhood, and I now came on it while I was teaching in the United States Naval Academy which, as every one knows, is an utterly matter-of-fact place completely surrounded by the seas of romance. I was at the time steeped in the practical details of ships, and their

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<sup>1</sup> See "My First Book," printed as an introduction to *Treasure Island* in the Biographical Edition.

history. Moreover, so far as fiction went, I had just made the discovery, in the Academy library, of Joseph Conrad and his true romances of the sea, which at once became and have remained my favorite books in that supreme part of nature. And one day I picked up *Treasure Island* with a premonition that it had come to me, alas, too late; for I knew well enough what the story was about. Instead, I launched on a voyage second to none. I was never surer that I had really got somewhere at last, that this was one of those bits of geography from which no traveler willingly returns, which with years do not fade in his mind, which bring the conviction that he has again seen the promised land and reassure him that he can never live quite in vain.

Will you read the opening pages once more. It will take only a moment.

#### THE OLD SEA DOG AT THE "ADMIRAL BENBOW"

"Squire Trelawney, Dr. Livesey, and the rest of these gentlemen having asked me to write down the whole particulars about *Treasure Island*, from the beginning to the end, keeping nothing back but the bearings of the island, and that only because there is still treasure not yet lifted, I take up my pen in the year of grace 17—, and go back to the time when my father kept the 'Admiral Benbow' inn, and the brown old seaman, with the sabre cut, first took up his lodging under our roof.

"I remember him as if it were yesterday, as he came plodding to the inn door, his sea chest following behind him in a hand-barrow; a tall, strong, heavy, nut-brown man; his tarry pigtail falling over the shoulders of his soiled blue coat; his hands ragged and scarred, with black, broken nails; and the sabre cut across one cheek, a dirty, livid white. I remember him looking round the cove and whistling to himself as he did so, and then breaking out in that old sea-song that he sang so often afterwards:—

"'Fifteen men on the dead man's chest—  
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!'

in the high, old tottering voice that seemed to have been tuned and broken at the capstan bars. Then he rapped on the door with a bit of stick like a handspike that he carried, and when my father appeared, called roughly for a glass of rum. This, when it was brought to him, he drank slowly, like a connoisseur, lingering on the taste, and still looking about him at the cliffs and up at our signboard.

"'This is a handy cove,' says he, at length; 'and a pleasant sittytated grog-shop. Much company, mate?'

"My father told him no, very little company, the more was the pity.

"'Well, then,' said he, 'this is the berth for me. Here, you, matey,' he cried to the man who trundled the barrow; 'bring up alongside and help up my chest. I'll stay here a bit,' he continued. 'I'm a

plain man; rum and bacon and eggs is what I want, and that head up there for to watch ships off. What you mought call me? You mought call me captain. Oh, I see what you're at—there;' and he threw down three or four gold pieces on the threshold. 'You can tell me when I've worked through that,' says he, looking as fierce as a commander.

"And, indeed, bad as his clothes were, and coarsely as he spoke, he had none of the appearance of a man who sailed before the mast; but seemed like a mate or skipper, accustomed to be obeyed or to strike. The man who came with the barrow told us the mail had set him down the morning before at the 'Royal George;' that he had inquired what inns there were along the coast, and hearing ours well spoken of, I suppose, and described as lonely, had chosen it from the others for his place of residence. And that was all we could learn of our guest.

"He was a very silent man by custom. All day he hung round the cove, or upon the cliffs, with a brass telescope; all evening he sat in a corner of the parlour next the fire, and drank rum and water very strong. Mostly he would not speak when spoken to; only look up sudden and fierce, and blow through his nose like a fog-horn; and we and the people who came about our house soon learned to let him be. Every day, when he came back from his stroll, he would ask if any seafaring men had gone by along the road? At first we thought it was the want of company of his own kind that made him ask this question; but at last we began to see he was



desirous to avoid them. When a seaman put up at the 'Admiral Benbow' (as now and then some did, making by the coast road for Bristol), he would look in at him through the curtained door before he entered the parlour; and he was always sure to be as silent as a mouse when any such was present. For me, at least, there was no secret about the matter; for I was, in a way, a sharer in his alarms. He had taken me aside one day, and promised me a silver fourpenny on the first of every month if I would only keep my 'weather-eye open for a seafaring man with one leg,' and let him know the moment he appeared. Often enough, when the first of the month came round, and I applied to him for my wage, he would only blow through his nose at me, and stare me down; but before the week was out he was sure to think better of it, bring me my fourpenny piece, and repeat his orders to look out for 'the seafaring man with one leg.' . . .

"It was not very long after this that there occurred the first of the mysterious events that rid us at last of the captain, though not, as you will see, of his affairs. It was a bitter cold winter, with long, hard frosts and heavy gales; and it was plain from the first that my poor father was little likely to see the spring. He sank daily, and my mother and I had all the inn upon our hands; and were kept busy enough, without paying much regard to our unpleasant guest.

"It was one January morning, very early—a

pinching, frosty morning—the cove all grey with hoar-frost, the ripple lapping softly on the stones, the sun still low and only touching the hill-tops and shining far to seaward. The captain had risen earlier than usual, and set out down the beach, his cutlass swinging under the broad skirts of the old blue coat, his brass telescope under his arm, his hat tilted back upon his head. I remember his breath hanging like smoke in his wake as he strode off. . . .

“Well, mother was up-stairs with father; and I was laying the breakfast table against the captain’s return, when the parlour door opened, and a man stepped in on whom I had never set my eyes before. He was a pale, tallowy creature, wanting two fingers of the left hand; and though he wore a cutlass, he did not look much like a fighter. I had always my eye open for seafaring men, with one leg or two, and I remember this one puzzled me. He was not sailorly, and yet he had a smack of the sea about him too.

“I asked him what was for his service, and he said he would take rum; but as I was going out of the room to fetch it he sat down upon a table and motioned me to draw near. I paused where I was with my napkin in my hand.

“‘Come here, sonny,’ says he. ‘Come nearer here.’ I took a step nearer.

“‘Is this here table for my mate Bill?’ he asked, with a kind of leer.

"I told him I did not know his mate Bill; and this was for a person who stayed in our house, whom we called the captain.

"'Well,' said he, 'my mate Bill would be called the captain, as like as not. He has a cut on one cheek, and a mighty pleasant way with him, particularly in drink, has my mate Bill. We'll put it, for argument like, that your captain has a cut on one cheek—and we'll put it, if you like, that that cheek's the right one. Ah, well! I told you. Now, is my mate Bill in this here house?'

"I told him he was out walking.

"'Which way, sonny? Which way is he gone?'

"And when I had pointed out the rock and told him how the captain was likely to return, and how soon, and answered a few other questions, 'Ah,' said he, 'this'll be as good as drink to my mate Bill.'

"The expression of his face as he said these words was not at all pleasant, and I had my own reasons for thinking that the stranger was mistaken, even supposing he meant what he said. But it was no affair of mine, I thought; and, besides, it was difficult to know what to do. The stranger kept hanging about just inside the inn door, peering round the corner like a cat waiting for a mouse. Once I stepped out myself into the road, but he immediately called me back, and, as I did not obey quick enough for his fancy, a most horrible change came over his tallowy face, and he ordered me in, with an oath that made me jump. As soon as I was back again he returned to his former manner, half fawning, half

sneering, patted me on the shoulder, told me I was a good boy, and he had taken quite a fancy to me. 'I have a son of my own,' said he, 'as like you as two blocks, and he's all the pride of my 'art. But the great thing for boys is discipline, sonny—discipline. Now, if you had sailed along of Bill, you wouldn't have stood there to be spoke to twice—not you. That was never Bill's way, nor the way of sich as sailed with him. And here, sure enough, is my mate Bill, with a spyglass under his arm, bless his old 'art, to be sure. You and me'll just go back into the parlour, sonny, and get behind the door, and we'll give Bill a little surprise—bless his 'art, I say again.'

"So saying, the stranger backed along with me into the parlour, and put me behind him in the corner, so that we were both hidden by the open door. I was very uneasy and alarmed, as you may fancy, and it rather added to my fears to observe that the stranger was certainly frightened himself. He cleared the hilt of his cutlass and loosened the blade in the sheath; and all the time we were waiting there he kept swallowing as if he felt what we used to call a lump in the throat.

"At last in strode the captain, slammed the door behind him, without looking to the right or left, and marched straight across the room to where his breakfast awaited him.

"'Bill,' said the stranger, in a voice that I thought he had tried to make bold and big.

"The captain spun round on his heel and fronted

us; all the brown had gone out of his face, and even his nose was blue; he had the look of a man who sees a ghost, or the evil one, or something worse, if anything can be; and, upon my word, I felt sorry to see him, all in a moment, turn so old and sick.

"'Come, Bill, you know me; you know an old shipmate, Bill, surely,' said the stranger.

"The captain made a sort of gasp.

"'Black Dog!' said he.

"'And who else?' returned the other, getting more at his ease. 'Black Dog as ever was, come for to see his old shipmate Billy, at the "Admiral Benbow" inn. Ah, Bill, Bill, we have seen a sight of times, us two, since I lost them two talons,' holding up his mutilated hand.

"'Now look here,' said the captain; 'you've run me down; here I am; well, then, speak up: what is it?'

"'That's you,' returned Black Dog; 'you're in the right of it, Billy. I'll have a glass of rum from this dear child here, as I've took such a liking to; and we'll sit down, if you please, and talk square, like old shipmates.'

"When I returned with the rum, they were already seated on either side of the captain's breakfast table—Black Dog next to the door, and sitting sideways, so as to have one eye on his old shipmate and one, as I thought, on his retreat.

"He bade me go and leave the door wide open. 'None of your keyholes for me, sonny,' he said; and I left them together and retired into the bar.

"For a long time, though I certainly did my best to listen, I could hear nothing but a low gabbling. But at last the voices began to grow higher, and I could pick up a word or two, mostly oaths, from the captain.

"'No, no, no, no; and an end of it!' he cried once. And again, 'If it comes to swinging, swing all, say I.'

"Then all of a sudden there was a tremendous explosion of oaths and other noises—the chair and the table went over in a lump, a clash of steel followed, and then a cry of pain, and the next instant I saw Black Dog in full flight, and the captain hotly pursuing, both with drawn cutlasses, and the former streaming blood from the left shoulder. Just at the door the captain aimed at the fugitive one last tremendous cut, which would certainly have split him to the chine had it not been intercepted by our big signboard of Admiral Benbow. You may see the notch on the lower side of the frame to this day.

"That blow was the last of the battle. Once out upon the road, Black Dog, in spite of his wound, showed a wonderful clean pair of heels and disappeared over the edge of the hill in half a minute. The captain, for his part, stood staring at the signboard like a bewildered man. Then he passed his hand over his eyes several times, and at last turned back into the house.

"'Jim,' says he, 'rum;,' and as he spoke he reeled a little and caught himself with one hand against the wall.

"'Are you hurt?' cried I.

"'Rum,' he repeated. 'I must get away from here. Rum! rum!'

"I ran to fetch it; but I was quite unsteadied by all that had fallen out, and I broke one glass and fouled the tap, and while I was still getting in my own way I heard a loud fall in the parlour, and, running in, beheld the captain lying full length upon the floor. . . .

"A great deal of blood was taken before the captain opened his eyes and looked mistily about him. First he recognized the doctor with an unmistakable frown; then his glance fell upon me, and he looked relieved. But suddenly his colour changed, and he tried to raise himself, crying:—

"'Where's Black Dog?'

"'There is no Black Dog here,' said the doctor, 'except what you have on your own back. You have been drinking rum; you have had a stroke, precisely as I told you; and I have just, very much against my own will, dragged you headforemost out of the grave. Now, Mr. Bones—'

"'That's not my name,' he interrupted.

"'Much I care,' returned the doctor. 'It's the name of a buccaneer of my acquaintance; and I call you by it for the sake of shortness, and what I have to say to you is this: one glass of rum won't kill you, but if you take one you'll take another and another, and I stake my wig if you don't break off short you'll die—do you understand that?—die, and go to your own place, like the man in the Bible.

Come, now, make an effort. I'll help you to your bed for once.'

"Between us, with much trouble, we managed to hoist him up-stairs, and laid him on his bed, where his head fell back on the pillow, as if he were almost fainting.

" 'Now, mind you,' said the doctor, 'I clear my conscience—the name of rum for you is death.'

"And with that he went off to see my father, taking me with him by the arm.

" 'This is nothing,' he said, as soon as he had closed the door. 'I have drawn blood enough to keep him quiet awhile; he should lie for a week where he is—that is the best thing for him and you; but another stroke would settle him.'

"About noon I stopped at the captain's door with some cooling drinks and medicines. He was lying very much as we had left him, only a little higher, and he seemed both weak and excited. . . .

" 'Jim,' he said, at length, 'you saw that seafaring man to-day?'

" 'Black Dog?' I asked.

" 'Ah! Black Dog,' says he. '*He's* a bad un; but there's worse that put him on. Now, if I can't get away nohow, and they tip me the black spot, mind you, it's my old sea-chest they're after; you get on a horse—you can, can't you? Well, then, you get on a horse, and go to—well, yes, I will!—to that eternal Doctor swab, and tell him to pipe all hands—magistrates and sich—and he'll lay 'em aboard at the "Admiral Benbow"—all old Flint's crew, man



and boy, all on 'em that's left. I was first mate, I was, old Flint's first mate, and I'm the on'y one as knows the place. He gave it me at Savannah, when he lay a-dying, like as if I was to now, you see. But you won't peach unless they get the black spot on me, or unless you see that Black Dog again, or a seafaring man with one leg, Jim—him above all.'

"'But what is the black spot, captain?' I asked.

"'That's a summons, mate. I'll tell you if they get that. But you keep your weather-eye open, Jim, and I'll share with you equals, upon my honour.' "

#### IV

The genius of sheer fiction is in these first pages. No other story of buried treasure will ever have such a start as this. The way in which the original crew of cut-throats is unwittingly reassembled by Squire Trelawny and their acceptance forced on Doctor Livesy and the captain, in spite of protest, is all the most fascinating invention. Whimsicality in no way robs the reader of excitement. And it seems to me that Stevenson's special gift lay in the combination of thrilling romance and wonderful nonsense. "No born fools would have started with such a crew as that," you may say. "And the seamanship! let alone Jim Hawkins, a mere boy, tackling an old-fashioned two-hundred-ton schooner about the island all by himself!" The answer to such questions is not the answer of reason. But, for my own part, I used to do the very thing when

I was ten years old and still completely landlocked by the Berkshire Hills. I have done it recently several times with Jim Hawkins, and I shall never believe that a fact in romance isn't as much a fact as in actuality and a sight more real at the same time, if a man like R. L. S. says so. As for seamanship, I am sure there is no officer in the navy who would not sail under Captain Smollet any day in the year and never offer to mend his vocabulary one jot or tittle. You may prefer *The Bluejacket's Manual*, and carry it in your hip-pocket to guard against mistakes, but I prefer to pull the wrong tackle now and then with Stevenson, who himself, it is true, barely knew one rope's end from another. And if one were to drown, after the manner of Shelley, with the sheets belayed, how much finer, and how far less ironical, to have them discover afterward that one had been navigating by *Treasure Island* instead of by the *Manual*.

It was certainly with pardonable condescension that Stevenson remarked in a letter to Henley, when the tale had appeared in book form, that he knew very well his seamanship was "jimmy," but that if his characters were fairly lively on the wires he wanted applause—for the work, he added, "is not a work of realism."

Romance does not depend for its power on fidelity to externals, but rather, like poetry, on the tone and on the rhythm of fancy. Later, when Stevenson knew infinitely more about the sea and ships and islands than he did in his first story; when he

had himself lived through a voyage of strange adventure somewhere off the edge of the chart, S. S. W. out of San Francisco, could he write romance any more truly? He could be infinitely more faithful to detail. But you may go to sleep in the vaunted "realism" of *The Wrecker*,<sup>1</sup> and though *The Ebb Tide* is gruesome enough to keep one awake, a nap being hardly possible with that little cockney Huish lurking about, is it the pretty piece of navigation that charms you, or something else? No, Stevenson never wrote another tale of the sea to compare with your first reading of *Treasure Island*. One must not hope to make such a voyage twice, except in memory.

Therefore, if you ask where else in Stevenson can be found anything nearly like this, as boyish and as eternally captivating, I believe I should recommend you, first of all, to read the book straight over. It will stand it—a rare thing for a mere romance. It is there you will find afresh what you are looking for. Then I should suggest that story of "The Sire de Malétroit's Door" at the end of the volume of *New Arabian Nights*; and I should be inclined to add that in no other spot in all Stevenson will you so nearly find the acme of adventure as you do in those twenty pages. That is also one of the classics. There are, to be sure, the opening chapters of "The Pavilion on the Links," and things just as good of a different sort in other of his short stories

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<sup>1</sup> See the Epilogue to Will Low at the end of *The Wrecker*.

of which we shall speak later. But in Stevenson's longer romances you might look far and in vain, especially in those books planned primarily for boys.

## V

Certainly you won't find it in *The Black Arrow*, a yarn written very rapidly the year after *Treasure Island* at Hyères and Royat. Compared to *Treasure Island*, it is much like dreaming to order. In the first place, there is inserted, ready-made, almost every possible element of boy-and-girl melodrama, and of course a great deal of it is as good as such things can be. The very idea of the mysterious arrows which arrive one by one fascinates the imagination. The third of them, I think it is, crashes through the high, stained-glass window, when Dick and Sir Daniel are talking in the chapel, and sticks quivering into the long table. That is a pretty good place, and the human eye in the tapestry of the Savage Hunter is a devilish good bit of old machinery. But the trouble is that here the whole principle of fitness is overdone, is carried out almost as completely as in the stories of Hayward and Skelt. When the castle is attacked from the sea there is, in the first place, a thick black night made extra thick and black by a driving snow-storm and extra confusing and boisterous by the wine which the ruffians get up from the hold of the ship. The castle has a secret passage, a trap door, a haunted room, a dark moat to swim—everything that the word

*castle* stands for in the medieval mind of a small boy. At the end, the villainous bridegroom is shot at the altar, and the hero inherits. I have not counted the number of people who are killed in *The Black Arrow*, but there must be one for every page. Therefore you will conclude properly that it is not at all a bad tale for children, or for anybody whose historical fancy is easily roused and for whom phrases like "methinks," "alack," "varlet with a link," "nay, I am shrewedly afraid, Sir Parson, but this runs hard on sacrilege," are the essence of local color. But you will not care to read it yourself.

I think you will also look in vain through *St. Ives*, a long and spirited yarn which Stevenson had not quite brought to an end when he died. *St. Ives* is a serious matter; far more serious than *Treasure Island*, because it is first of all a character study, and a boy's story of plot but incidentally. In it Stevenson has expended a vast amount of art, and, one might add, of artificiality. *St. Ives*, an irrepressible young Frenchman, beyond doubt the most fluent lad in Europe, intrudes his high spirits into every corner of the endless adventure, and in the end strikes you as made of nothing so much as of words. He is a most consistent character—most wonderfully sustained—a veritable impersonation of the maxim, "*le style c'est l'homme*." But thus, though the whole thing is a breathless tale of the road, of inns, of escape and pursuit, with a lot about love, in the days just before Waterloo, you will not find that charm of incident which you may

be looking for. The point of the story is merely to talk—and I can not help remarking that it was written entirely by dictation. It is told with a sort of flurry that overwhelms rather than stimulates. Stevenson knew his Dumas; but Dumas never wore us out with the activity of his vocabulary or confused us with a medley of language. In Dumas there was always some purpose in sight, something to settle down to. In *St. Ives*, and in too many of Stevenson's other books, the improbability of any significant end or purpose robs the reader of considerable satisfaction by the way. He ceases to guess at what the turns of the plot may point to, for it grows steadily more and more obvious that a whimsical purposelessness, a day to day foresight, usurps the place of thoroughness of imagination.

Better than *St. Ives* is *The Wrecker*, a delightful, nonsensical medley, which has in the midst of itself a mystery of the ocean that for a few chapters will vie with your memory of *Treasure Island*. It is, however, quite a different sort of mystery. The germs of the tale Lloyd Osbourne and Stevenson discovered at Honolulu, in 1889, from a shipwrecked crew who had just arrived in the harbor under most peculiar circumstances. The two authors proceeded to develop the matter during their subsequent cruise to Samoa. So the story was written in the very atmosphere and on the very waters of romance which it describes. But some of the romance gives way to realism, and much of the charm to a spooky, detective sort of plot which I believe

the authors thought would make a hit with the American public. You will find, nevertheless, in Chapter XIV, entitled "The Cabin of the *Flying Scud*," if you read every word of the previous medley of two hundred seventy-eight pages and understand all its intricacies, a bit of excitement not to be missed. At least you will be as neatly puzzled for a time as you ever have been between the covers of a book. But you will not be charmed.

## VI

It is only in *Kidnapped*, a tale of 1745 in Scotland, that Stevenson has given us many pages that definitely compare with *Treasure Island*. *Kidnapped* was Stevenson's favorite among all his books; and I have known a few people who agree with this judgment, though it is notorious that an author always prefers his second best to his best—on the ground, I suppose, of sympathy with the under-dog. *Kidnapped*, divorced from its sentimental sequel, *Catriona*, is certainly a very fair second. It was written in 1886, five years after *Treasure Island*. (*Catriona*, or *David Balfour*, as the book was entitled in America, belongs to the *St. Ives* period, much later.) The true spirit of adventure descends upon the hero, David, and under the guidance of Alan Breck he moves spellbound through all the wonderful antics of the action. David is of course R. L. S., and also there is much of R. L. S. in Alan Breck, with his ro-

mantic philosophy, his exhibition of all the gestures of bravado, and the flashing brand of his glorified egotism. Hence these two, so intimately idealized, are very real people to the fancy. If you care for Jim Hawkins, searching Billy Bones's sea-chest, or hiding under the bridge in the foggy night, or hiding again in an apple barrel, you will care for David on the old staircase in the House of Shaws, and for David and Alan in the deckhouse of the *Covenant*, on the rock in Glencoe stream, and in their long flight through the heather. The pieces are all of the same fabric. You may open the book very much where you will. The nature of it is like this:

"For all our hurry, day began to come in while we were still far from any shelter. It found us in a prodigious valley, strewn with rocks and where ran a foaming river. Wild mountains stood around it; there grew there neither grass nor trees; and I have sometimes thought since then that it may have been the valley called Glencoe, where the massacre was in the time of King William. But for the details of our itinerary, I am all to seek; our way lying now by short cuts, now by great detours; our pace being so hurried; our time of journeying usually by night; and the names of such places as I asked and heard being in the Gaelic tongue and the more easily forgotten.

"The first peep of morning, then, showed us this horrible place, and I could see Alan knit his brow.



“‘This is no fit place for you and me,’ he said. ‘This is a place they’re bound to watch.’

“And with that he ran harder than ever down to the water-side in a part where the river was split in two among three rocks. It went through with a horrid thundering that made my belly quake; and there hung over the lynn a mist of spray. Alan looked neither to the right nor to the left, but jumped clean upon the middle rock and fell there on his hands and knees to check himself, for that rock was small and he might have pitched over on the far side. I had scarce time to measure the distance or to understand the peril before I had followed him, and he had caught and stopped me.

“So there we stood, side by side upon a small rock slippery with spray, a far broader leap in front of us, and the river dinning upon all sides. When I saw where I was there came on me a deadly sickness of fear, and I put my hand over my eyes. Alan took me and shook me; I saw he was speaking, but the roaring of the falls and the trouble of my mind prevented me from hearing; only I saw his face was red with anger, and that he stamped upon the rock. The same look showed me the water raging by and the mist hanging in the air; and with that I covered my eyes again and shuddered.

“The next minute Alan had set the brandy bottle to my lips, and forced me to drink about a gill, which sent the blood into my head again. Then, putting his hands to his mouth and his mouth to my ear he shouted, ‘Hang or Drown!’ and turning

his back upon me leaped over the farther branch of the stream and landed safe.

"I was now alone upon the rock, which gave me the more room; the brandy was singing in my ears; I had this good example fresh before me, and just wit enough to see that if I did not leap at once I should never leap at all. I bent low on my knees and flung myself forth, with that kind of anger of despair that has sometimes stood me in stead of courage. Sure enough, it was but my hands that reached the full length; these slipped, caught again, slipped again; and I was slithering back into the lynn, when Alan seized me, first by the hair, then by the collar and with a great strain dragged me into safety.

"Never a word he said, but set off running again for his life, and I must stagger to my feet and run after him. I had been weary before, but now I was sick and bruised, and partly drunken with the brandy; I kept stumbling as I ran, I had a stitch that came near to overmaster me; and when at last Alan paused under a great rock that stood there among a number of others, it was none too soon for David Balfour.

"A great rock, I have said; but by rights it was two rocks leaning together at the top, both some twenty feet high, and at the first sight inaccessible. Even Alan (though you may say he had as good as four hands) failed twice in an attempt to climb them; and it was only at the third trial, and then by standing on my shoulders and leaping up with

such force as I thought must have broken my collar-bone, that he secured a lodgment. Once there, he let down his leathern girdle; and with the aid of that and a pair of shallow footholds in the rock I scrambled up beside him.

"Then I saw why we had come there; for the two rocks, both being somewhat hollow on the top and sloping one to the other, made a kind of dish or saucer, where as many as three or four men might have lain hidden.

"All this while Alan had not said a word, and had run and climbed with such a savage, silent frenzy of hurry, that I knew he was in mortal fear of some miscarriage. Even now we were on the rock he said nothing, nor so much as relaxed the frowning look upon his face; but clapped flat down, and keeping only one eye above the edge of our place of shelter scouted all round the compass. The dawn had come quite clear; we could see the stony sides of the valley, and its bottom, which was bestrewed with rocks, and the river, which went from one side to another, and made white falls; but nowhere the smoke of a house, nor any living creature but some eagles screaming round a cliff.

"Then at last Alan smiled.

" 'Ay,' said he, 'now we have a chance;' and then looking at me with some amusement, 'Ye're no very gleg at the jumping,' said he.

"At this I suppose I coloured with mortification, for he added at once, 'Hoots! small blame to ye! To

be feared of a thing and yet to do it, is what makes the prettiest kind of a man. And then there was water there, and water's a thing that dauntons even me. No, no,' said Alan, 'it's no you that's to blame, it's me.'

"I asked him why.

"'Why,' said he, 'I have proved myself a gomerall this night. For the first of all I take a wrong road, and that in my own country of Appin; so that the day has caught us where we should never have been; and thanks to that, we lie here in some danger and mair discomfort. And next (which is the worst of the two, for a man that has been so much among the heather as myself) I have come wanting a water-bottle, and here we lie for a long summer's day with naething but neat spirit. Ye may think that a small matter; but before it comes night, David, ye'll give me news of it.'

"I was anxious to redeem my character, and offered, if he would pour out the brandy, to run down and fill the bottle at the river.

"'I wouldnae waste the good spirit either,' says he. 'It's been a good friend to you this night, or in my poor opinion, ye would still be cocking on yon stone. And what's mair,' says he, 'ye may have observed (you that's a man of so much penetration) that Alan Breck Stewart was perhaps walking quicker than his ordinar'.'

"'You!' I cried, 'you were running fit to burst.'

"'Was I so?' said he. 'Well, then, ye may de-

pend upon it, there was nae time to be lost. And now were is enough said; gang you to your sleep, lad, and I'll watch.'

"Accordingly I lay down to sleep; a little peaty earth had drifted in between the top of the two rocks, and some bracken grew there, to be a bed to me; the last thing I heard was the crying of the eagles.

"I daresay it would be nine in the morning when I was roughly awakened, and found Alan's hand pressed upon my mouth.

"'Wheesht!' he whispered. 'Ye were snoring.'

"'Well,' said I, surprised at his anxious and dark face, 'and why not?'

"He peered over the edge of the rock, and signed to me to do the like.

"It was now high day, cloudless, and very hot. The valley was as clear as in a picture. About half-a-mile up the water was a camp of redcoats; a big fire blazed in their midst, at which some were cooking; and near by, on the top of a rock about as high as ours, there stood a sentry, with the sun sparkling on his arms. All the way down along the riverside were posted other sentries; here near together, there widelier scattered; some planted like the first on places of command, some on the ground level, and marching and countermarching, so as to meet half way. Higher up the glen, where the ground was more open, the chain of posts was continued by horse-soldiers, whom we could see in the distance riding to and fro. Lower down the infantry con-

tinued; but as the stream was suddenly swelled by the confluence of a considerable burn, they were more widely set, and only watched the fords and stepping-stones.

"I took but one look at them and ducked again into my place. It was strange indeed to see this valley, which had lain so solitary in the hour of dawn, bristling with arms and dotted with the red-coats and breeches.

" 'Ye see,' said Alan, 'this was what I was afraid of Davie: that they would watch the burnside. They began to come in about two hours ago, and, man! but ye're a grand hand at sleeping! We're in a narrow place. If they get up the sides of the hill they could easily spy us with a glass; but if they'll only keep in the foot of the valley, we'll do yet. The posts are thinner down the water; and come night we'll try our hand at getting by them.'

" 'And what are we to do till night?' I asked.

" 'Lie here,' says he 'and birstle.' "—*Kidnapped*.

There is a zest for adventure in this story and in *Treasure Island* which perhaps only D'Artagnan surpasses. Certainly there are few others which for this come up to it. Amyas Leigh in Charles Kingsley's romance, John Ridd, in *Lorna Doone*, are not far behind, and in other respects may have delights for the reader which David and Alan and Jim Hawkins can not offer. But these are the immortals in England.

## CHAPTER X

### ROMANCE, MELODRAMA, AND FARCE

#### I

*TREASURE ISLAND* and *Kidnapped* are classics of their kind, not great romances, certainly, to vie with Dumas in scope, but tales that take one over the borders of real life as wholly for the time as any of them. They will always be for us part of the Great Illusion.

*Treasure Island* was Stevenson's promise of a greater romance; and surely it would seem that the inventor of this day-dream could have sustained other and wider visions. But the promise was never fulfilled, and the truth is that Stevenson's habit of work rather precluded it. His fine work was to be done, as it already had been, in the romantic fable and essay—not in anything much over a hundred pages long. "Will o' the Mill" is perhaps the best thing before *Treasure Island*; *Dr. Jekyll*, "Markheim," "The Treasure of Franchard," "The Isle of Voices," are among the best things that follow. They are not his long romances, only one or two of which he knew how to bring to a real conclusion.

Stevenson never had enough continuous energy to learn the craft of sustained fiction as Dumas learned it. The delightful, characteristic story of how *Treasure Island* was composed has its moral. The map of the island was drawn first—before there was idea of anything more than a yarn to amuse Lloyd Osbourne with; then Stevenson's father made a list of all the articles in Billy Bones's sea-chest; and Stevenson, finding two interested auditors, wrote a chapter each day for fifteen days to read aloud to them, after which not another incident could be for some time imagined. This was at Brænar, in the summer of 1881, and Gosse and Colvin, visiting him there, so much encouraged him to continue that he finally succeeded in carrying it on; but Mrs. Stevenson says that had the tale not shortly begun to appear as a serial in *Young Folks* it would probably never have been concluded.

One of Stevenson's faults, the fault of random progress of which there is so much evidence in his longer works, is due partly to the exaggerated importance which romance *as a method* had for him in art. There is something delightfully humorous and gay about his habit of reading aloud to a breathless audience the first chapters of a marvelous tale that leads in a day or two into a nearly inextricable *cul-de-sac*, out of which, if he is to come at all, it is only by means of the pick and shovel. It was undoubtedly more fun to keep up his spirits with beginnings and plans, when his troubles made him incapable of any prolonged labor, than to guard



his energy for the real work in hand. He usually kept three or four stories going at once and was forever making wonderful lists of a dozen others that he expected to attack in a week or so. It exhilarated him beyond measure to write up his first conception of a plot; and his audience always caught the contagion. "No finished story," says one of his friends, "was, or ever will be, so good as *Weir of Hermiston* shone to us in those days by the light of its author's first ardour of creation." And Gosse, who was one of the fortunate people to hear *Treasure Island* thus read aloud, says, "I look back to no keener intellectual pleasure than those cold nights at Bræmar, with the sleet howling outside, and Louis reading his budding romance by the lamplight, emphasizing the purpler passages with lifted voice and gesticulating finger." Stevenson seems to have needed the excitement, human sympathy and applause of an audience. This is a sociable trait. But I imagine that if their interest flagged he began to work at something else. I think that as the plot of these splendid beginnings was discovered not to be a plot, only a situation with one or two obviously contingent situations, the author's enthusiasm fell, the construction of the story became mechanical, and the movement came to depend almost entirely on keeping up a certain line of talk, a certain attitudinizing, among the characters. Romance, as a method of craftsmanship, is not often successful. An author can hardly hope to do for himself, as he writes, what he tries to do for the

reader, as that gentleman reads. But Stevenson was always attempting it.

In his own life and in his philosophy, Stevenson carried out the trick with *éclat*, or at least trammelled up the disillusionment. But in romantic fiction, just as in realistic fiction, the magician must have his stand outside the spell he creates. He must always be in control. He must be able to see it all complete. In other words, the final method, even of the dreamer, is not to be dreaming, but to have dreamed. In spite of the fact that one could not possibly make a romance by the stark impersonal methods of realism, this general principle still holds true. It is a principle that Stevenson in nearly all his shorter things understands, and then, curiously enough, in nearly all his longer stories forgets. He tells as he goes, dreams away boldly in plain view, and therefore can say no more than the reader what is coming next. Before he knows it the spell has vanished. From the point of view of artistic unity there is very little of Stevenson besides the essays, fables, and short stories that is satisfactory; and *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*, alone of his longer books, will belong to English literature. In *Treasure Island* the yarn spinner's method was fortunate. All the random and whimsical episodes chime in and the end is the ample conclusion of what has gone before. This can be said of no other long tale except *The Ebb-Tide*, which, since it has a *moral* to teach, has its end in view from the beginning. Of the shorter pieces over fifty pages long,

the only well-rounded-out performance, also of the moral order, is *Dr. Jekyll*.

But in Stevenson so great often is the charm of style from page to page that the fault of incompleteness or shiftiness of plot by no means robs the reader of his pleasure. For those who are fascinated by the act of story-telling, who never really wish for the end and who care little for it in relation to the hazard of the incidents, there is much entertainment to be had from following the Stevensonian fancy wherever it wanders.

## II

In Stevenson's first tale of any length, "The Pavilion on the Links," written in California, this charm is at first very subtly at work. One is soon aware that the plot is too melodramatic to come to very much, but meanwhile there is probably no better beginning for a wildly romantic extravaganza than the first chapter, which tells "How I Camped in Graden Seawood and Beheld a Light in the Pavilion." The scenery here is that of convincing and enthralling unreality. The desolate stretch of sand along the German Ocean, the lonely cabin at some distance from the wood, the mysterious nocturnal landing from the yacht, the presence of Italians in the fishing village, all this induces an atmosphere tensely ominous. It is as well, however, an atmosphere so hauntingly dreamlike that any definite action must play into it at first imperceptibly or

most certainly strike a false note; and Stevenson did not know how to manage this. The issue is a sentimental anticlimax, which turns the spell at the crucial moment into clap-trap.

But in the next tale that he attempted, this fault is at least so long delayed, the atmosphere of suspense is so long continued, and the dime-novel conclusion, due to what Stevenson has called "ease of dreaming," is so brief as to allow the whole piece almost its proper unity of tone. *The Merry Men*, written just before he began *Treasure Island*, is, save for the very end, one of Stevenson's masterpieces, and illustrates his weirdly fantastic imagination at its best. While he was at work on it, in July, 1881, at Pitlochry, he wrote Colvin: "If ever I shall make a hit I have the line now, as I believe." Certainly it strikes many of the notes to which his temperament always vibrated; and two years later, at Hyères, the hearing of it read by a friend moved him strangely. He calls it "a fantastic sonata about the sea"; but later, realizing perhaps that the very end did not belong to any of the themes previously developed in the sonata, he had determined to make it much longer, "with a whole new dénouement, not quite clear to me." This he never accomplished, not being able, as his wife has said, to get a real grip on his story. What he needed to do was to prevent the story from emerging, with bald farce at the last moment, out of its poetic atmosphere.

The dominant theme of this sonata about the sea

is the terror that surrounds the storm-beaten island of Aros. The story begins with a strong sense of it which is afterward never quite unfelt as the thin, queer thread of the plot appears and disappears through its variations. In two pages of Eilean Aros, you are, as nearly always in Stevenson, who was a master of beginnings, succumbing to a peculiar enchantment.

“On all this part of the coast, and especially near Aros, these great granite rocks that I have spoken of go down together in troops into the sea, like cattle on a summer’s day. There they stand, for all the world like their neighbours ashore; only the salt water sobbing between them instead of the quiet earth, and clots of sea-pink blooming on their sides instead of heather; and the great sea conger to wreath about the base of them instead of the poisonous viper of the land. On calm days you can go wandering between them in a boat for hours, echoes following you about the labyrinth; but when the sea is up, Heaven help the man that hears that cauldron boiling.

“Off the southwest end of Aros these blocks are very many, and much greater in size. Indeed, they must grow monstrously bigger out to sea, for there must be ten sea miles of open water sown with them as thick as a country place with houses, some standing thirty feet above the tides, some covered, but all perilous to ships; so that on a clear, westerly blowing day I have counted, from the top of Aros, the

great rollers breaking white and heavy over as many as six-and-forty buried reefs. But it is nearer in shore that the danger is worst; for the tide, here running like a mill race, makes a long belt of broken water—a *Roost* we call it—at the tail of the land. I have often been out there in a dead calm at the slack of the tide; and a strange place it is, with the sea swirling and combing up and boiling like the cauldrons of a linn, and now and again a little dancing mutter of sound as though the *Roost* were talking to itself. But when the tide begins to run again, and above all in heavy weather, there is no man could take a boat within half a mile of it, nor a ship afloat that could either steer or live in such a place. You can hear the roaring of it six miles away. At the seaward end there comes the strongest of the bubble; and it's here that these big breakers dance together—the dance of death, it may be called—that have got the name in these parts of the Merry Men. I have heard it said that they run fifty feet high; but that must be the green water only, for the spray runs twice as high as that. Whether they got the name from their movements, which are swift and antic, or from the shouting they make about the turn of the tide, so that all Aros shakes with it, is more than I can tell.

“The truth is, that in a southwesterly wind, that part of our archipelago is no better than a trap. If a ship got through the reefs, and weathered the Merry Men, it would be to come ashore on the south coast of Aros, in Sandag Bay, where so many dis-

mal things befell our family, as I propose to tell. The thought of all these dangers, in the place I knew so long, makes me particularly welcome the works now going forward to set lights upon the headlands and buoys along the channels of our iron-bound, inhospitable islands.

“The country people had many a story about Aros, as I used to hear from my uncle’s man, Rorie, an old servant of the Macleans, who had transferred his services without afterthought on the occasion of the marriage. There was some tale of an unlucky creature, a sea-kelpie, that dwelt and did business in some fearful manner of his own among the boiling breakers of the Roost. A mermaid had once met a piper on Sandag beach, and there sang to him a long, bright midsummer’s night, so that in the morning he was found stricken crazy, and from thenceforward, till the day he died, said only one form of words; what they were in the original Gaelic I cannot tell, but they were thus translated: ‘Ah, the sweet singing out of the sea.’ Seals that haunted on that coast have been known to speak to man in his own tongue, presaging great disasters. It was here that a certain saint first landed on his voyage out of Ireland to convert the Hebrideans. And, indeed, I think he had some claim to be called a saint; for, with the boats of that past age, to make so rough passage, and land on such a ticklish coast, was surely not far short of the miraculous. It was to him, or to some of his monkish underlings who

had a cell there, that the islet owes its holy and beautiful name, the House of God."

Now, there is something wrong with Eilean Aros. The hero, on landing, is full of a sense of ominous locality. Undefined memories of evil haunt the air, suspicions of foul play. Whether these belong normally to the atmosphere of the place or whether they emanate from the strange mental state of Uncle Darnaway is not certain. The uncanny conversation of the old man, who is one of Stevenson's best brief characters, is perhaps the most powerful source of this doubt.

" 'Was it there?' asked my uncle.

" 'Ou, ay!' said Rorie.

"I observed that they both spoke in a manner of aside, and with some show of embarrassment, and that Mary herself appeared to colour, and looked down on her plate. Partly to show my knowledge, and so relieve the party from an awkward strain, partly because I was curious, I pursued the subject.

" 'You mean the fish?' I asked.

" 'Whatten fish?' cried my uncle. 'Fish, quo' he! Fish! Your een are fu' o' fatness, man; your heid dozed wi' carnal leir. Fish! it's a bogle!'

"He spoke with great vehemence, as though angry; and perhaps I was not very willing to be put down so shortly, for young men are disputatious. At least I remember I retorted hotly, crying out upon childish superstitions.



“ ‘And ye come frae the College!’ sneered Uncle Gordon. ‘Gude kens what they learn folk there; it’s no muckle service onyway. Do ye think, man, that there’s naething in a’ yon saut wilderness o’ a world oot wast there, wi’ the sea grasses growin’, an’ the sea beasts fechtin’, an’ the sun glintin’ down into it day by day? Na; the sea’s like the land, but fearsomer. If there’s folk ashore, there’s folk in the sea—deid they may be, but they’re folk whatever; and as for deils, there’s nane that’s like the sea deils. There’s no sae muckle harm in the land deils, when a’s said and done. Lang syne, when I was a callant in the south country, I mind there was an auld, bald bogle in the Peewie Moss. I got a glisk o’ him mysel’, sittin’ on his hunkers in a hag, as grey’s a tombstane. An’, troth, he was a fearsome-like taed. But he steered naebody. Nae doobt, if ane that was a reprobate, ane the Lord hated, had gane by there wi’ his sin still upon his stamach, nae doobt the creature would hae lowped upo’ the likes o’ him. But there’s deils in the deep sea would yoke on a communicant! Eh, sirs, if ye had gane doon wi’ the puir lads in the *Christ-Anna*, ye would ken by now the mercy o’ the seas. If ye had sailed it for as lang as me, ye would hate the thocht of it as I do. If ye had but used the een God gave ye, ye would hae learned the wickedness o’ that fause, saut, cauld, bullering creature, and of a’ that’s in it by the Lord’s permission: labsters an’ partans, an’ sic like, howking in the deid; muckle, gutsy, blawing whales; an’ fish—the hale clan o’ them—

cauld-warned, blind-eed uncanny ferlies. O, sirs,' he cried, 'the horror—the horror o' the sea!'

Very gradually it dawns on the reader that in Uncle Darnaway's mind is the source of the evil which permeates the whole island. In spite of external details that arouse suspicion, like the rare wood in the thwarts of the coble, noticed in the passage to Aros, only a faint guess about the whole strange matter can be made till all the complications are complete at the end of Chapter III. Because the threatened evil is really psychic, rather than an external thing, the author has from now on, a very puzzling situation to handle if he wishes to preserve its peculiar horror. The solution adopted at the last moment is crude. He brings on a storm, turns his mad murderer loose in the midst of it, and winds the matter up without more ado. Until the actual breaking of the storm the piece is a wonderfully fluent fantasy. From that point on, it is largely mechanical *tour de force*—"a braw nicht for a shipwreck!" and not much else—"twa in ae twal-month! eh, but the Merry Men'll dance bonny!"

So far as popularity goes, Stevenson was right in thinking that he had found his line in the romantic tale of terror. He had just written "Thrawn Janet," an inimitable piece in the Uncle Darnaway key, which, together with the tale of Todd Lapraik in *David Balfour*, seems, incidentally, to prove the superiority of the Scots vocabulary for spookiness over anything imaginable in plain English. But

where the creation of terror is the main purpose, Stevenson is really not often so successful as where it accompanies a moral theme. The stories of "Olalla" and "The Body Snatcher" do not compare in imaginative effects with "Markheim" or *Dr. Jekyll* or "The Bottle Imp" or "The Isle of Voices," which are his masterpieces. The first two stories are practically failures; the others are at once both far more terrible and far more interesting for their moral issue. So, in the long romances, the introduction of terror scenes for their own sake usually brought in as much clap-trap as thrills. The least satisfactory part of *The Master* is the live-burial in the wilderness. The devil-work is by no means the best part of "The Beach of Falesá." Melodrama is never quite out of sight in these places, and melodrama uncombined with farce is rarely successful in Stevenson.

### III

In two novels, *The Master* and the unfinished *Weir*, Stevenson had it in mind to involve in an atmosphere of strangeness and terror a more serious dramatic problem than he has elsewhere presented. In *The Master* he all but succeeded. The theme is of a fascinating romantic rarity, and yet with a sharp reference to life as the reader has himself observed it. The simplest terms of the plot give us an essentially dramatic confrontation between two brothers: At the time of the Forty-five

the elder of the two Duries of Ballantrae, sons of Lord Durrissdeer, joins the rebels at Culloden, and is forced afterward to live the life of a wanderer and exile. His younger brother, Henry, thus inherits, not only the estate, but also the girl who should have been the Master's wife. Presently the Master returns, the feeling for Prince Charlie's side being so strong in the neighborhood as to allow this without much fear of his betrayal to the authorities. By nature a proud, brilliant, and malicious man, his trials and adventures in strange lands and on the sea have given him a streak of diabolical perversity. He at once begins a systematic and vastly clever persecution of his brother, Henry, which seems to all outsiders, and even to his brother's wife, to put Henry in the wrong. The duel between the two goes on under the blind eyes of the girl who would have married the Master had fortune favored. Romantically in love with him, yet always nominally faithful to her husband, she becomes the perverse arbiter of the destinies of this inglorious combat. An oppressive terror, an ominousness which could only be dispelled by murder, begins to develop. It assumes gigantic psychological proportions. The character and purposes of the Master loom ever more and more dominant, and even in temporary defeat only more baffling. He is driven out of Ballantrae, hovers for years, a sort of roving Nemesis, over the invisible issue, and at last returns, fortified in villainy by the presence of a mysterious Indian servant, Secundra Dass.

Meanwhile Henry has justified himself to his wife. They vainly attempt to evade the Master by fleeing to New York, thus making possible in the plot, the preconceived finale, a live burial in the Adirondack forest, over which Secundra Dass presides. All this last part of the adventure, including the incidents in India and Mr. Mackellar's journey with the Master across the Atlantic, a model of sardonic humor, seems to be tacked on to the rest of the narrative. It is peculiarly oppressive, and the end brings no relief, no sense of issuing from what has been a rather meaningless *cul-de-sac*.

In his essay on "The Genesis of *The Master of Ballantrae*" Stevenson says that he planned the tale to be a tale of many lands, and that having located the main action in Ballantrae, the end in the Adirondacks, he needed only to get the Master in and out of India to complete his scheme. But obviously the true scheme is alone the confrontation of the two brothers. It is there that our whole attention is absorbed and not in the miscellaneous adventure. There is, of course, no reason why each element in the story should not enhance the others, or why they should not be inextricably linked. But the story has Stevenson's characteristic defects. The main theme is that of a problem novel; the method is that of the fantastically conceived romance. The two join only with mutual embarrassment. Also it must be confessed, even by those for whom the "grand carpentry" style in fiction has an unerring charm, that the end of this matter of the two Duris-

deers is mere melodrama—a preconceived end, to be sure, but not an adherent end. It neither throws a light back over the whole, nor serves to shroud the Master's strange character from our final scrutiny.

To the engrossing interest of the narrative these defects may not appear fatal—in Stevenson no defects of structure ever count as absolutely fatal. For being vastly clever page by page and always a stylist, he can piece out, hopefully putting off the day of reckoning till the reader's ear has been captured. And nowhere in Stevenson are there scenes of such dramatic deftness as those which show the Master on his first return, always a courteous, brilliant, cheerful gentleman in the presence of Henry's wife, and always the fiend when alone with Henry. Of all this the duel with swords fought in the garden in the still winter night, is a true "marking incident." Had it been more elaborately led up to, with a more careful picture of the locality and of the characters, it might well have served to bring the plot to a more direct and reasonable end, and have taken the place of the murder which, as I say, the atmosphere seems to demand. Certainly the Master is, at this moment of the duel, as we see him by the light of the candles in the midst of the frosted trees, one of the great villains of literature.

Let us listen for a few moments to Mr. Mackellar, the secretary, who reports this matter. It is perhaps the most powerful scene in all Stevenson.

ACCOUNT OF ALL THAT PASSED ON THE NIGHT OF  
FEBRUARY 27, 1757

"To show how far affairs had gone with Mr. Henry, I will give some words of his, uttered (as I have cause not to forget) upon the 26th of February, 1757. It was unseasonable weather, a cast back into Winter: windless, bitter cold, the world all white with rime, the sky low and gray: the sea black and silent like a quarry-hole. Mr. Henry sat close by the fire, and debated (as was now common with him) whether 'a man' should 'do things,' whether 'interference was wise,' and the like general propositions, which each of us particularly applied. I was by the window, looking out, when there passed below me the Master, Mrs. Henry, and Miss Katharine, that now constant trio. The child was running to and fro, delighted with the frost; the Master spoke close in the lady's ear with what seemed (even from so far) a devilish grace of insinuation; and she on her part looked on the ground like a person lost in listening. I broke out of my reserve.

" 'If I were you, Mr. Henry,' said I, 'I would deal openly with my lord.'

" 'Mackellar, Mackellar,' said he, 'you do not see the weakness of my ground. I can carry no such base thoughts to any one—to my father least of all; that would be to fall into the bottom of his scorn. The weakness of my ground,' he continued, 'lies in

myself, that I am not one who engages love. I have their gratitude, they all tell me that; I have a rich estate of it! But I am not present in their minds; they are moved neither to think with me nor to think for me. 'There is my loss!' He got to his feet, and trod down the fire. 'But some method must be found, Mackellar,' said he, looking at me suddenly over his shoulder; 'some way must be found. I am a man of a great deal of patience—far too much—far too much. I begin to despise myself. And yet, sure, never was a man involved in such a toil!' He fell back to his brooding.

"'Cheer up,' said I. 'It will burst of itself.'

"'I am far past anger now,' says he, which had so little coherency with my own observation that I let both fall.

"On the evening of the interview referred to, the Master went abroad; he was abroad a great deal of the next day also, that fatal 27th; but where he went, or what he did, we never concerned ourselves to ask until next day. If we had done so, and by any chance found out, it might have changed all. But as all we did was done in ignorance, and should be so judged, I shall so narrate these passages as they appeared to us in the moment of their birth, and reserve all that I since discovered for the time of its discovery. For I have now come to one of the dark parts of my narrative, and must engage the reader's indulgence for my patron.

"All the 27th that rigorous weather endured: a stifling cold; the folk passing about like smoking



chimneys; the wide hearth in the hall piled high with fuel; some of the spring birds that had already blundered north into our neighbourhood, besieging the windows of the house or trotting on the frozen turf like things distracted. About noon there came a blink of sunshine; showing a very pretty, wintry, frosty landscape of white hills and woods, with Crail's lugger waiting for a wind under the Craig Head, and the smoke mounting straight into the air from every farm and cottage. With the coming of night, the haze closed in overhead; it fell dark and still and starless, and exceeding cold: a night the most unseasonable, fit for strange events.

"Mrs. Henry withdrew, as was now her custom, very early. We had set ourselves of late to pass the evening with a game of cards; another mark that our visitor was wearying mightily of the life at Durrisdeer; and we had not been long at this when my old lord slipped from his place beside the fire, and was off without a word to seek the warmth of bed. The three thus left together had neither love nor courtesy to share; not one of us would have sat up one instant to oblige another; yet from the influence of custom, and as the cards had just been dealt, we continued the form of playing out the round. I should say we were late sitters; and though my lord had departed earlier than was his custom, twelve was already gone some time upon the clock, and the servants long ago in bed. Another thing I should say, that although I never saw the Master anyway affected with liquor, he had been

drinking freely, and was perhaps (although he showed it not) a trifle heated.

"Anyway, he now practised one of his transitions; and so soon as the door closed behind my lord, and without the smallest change of voice, shifted from ordinary civil talk into a stream of insult.

"‘My dear Henry, it is yours to play,’ he had been saying, and now continued: ‘It is a very strange thing how, even in so small a matter as a game of cards, you display your rusticity. You play, Jacob, like a bonnet laird, or a sailor in a tavern. The same dulness, the same petty greed, *cette lenteur d’hebété qui me fait rager*; it is strange I should have such a brother. Even Square-toes has a certain vivacity when his stake is imperilled; but the dreariness of a game with you I positively lack language to depict.’

"Mr. Henry continued to look at his cards, as though very maturely considering some play; but his mind was elsewhere.

"‘Dear God, will this never be done?’ cries the Master. ‘*Quel lourdeau!* But why do I trouble you with French expressions, which are lost on such an ignoramus? A *lourdeau*, my dear brother, is as we might say a bumpkin, a clown, a clodpole: a fellow without grace, lightness, quickness; any gift of pleasing, any natural brilliancy: such a one as you shall see, when you desire, by looking in the mirror. I tell you these things for your good, I assure you; and besides, Square-toes’ (looking at me and stifling

a yawn), "it is one of my diversions in this very dreary spot to toast you and your master at the fire like chestnuts. I have great pleasure in your case, for I observe the nickname (rustic as it is) has always the power to make you writhe. But sometimes I have more trouble with this dear fellow here, who seems to have gone to sleep upon his cards. Do you not see the applicability of the epithet I have just explained, dear Henry? Let me show you. For instance, with all those solid qualities which I delight to recognise in you, I never knew a woman who did not prefer me—nor, I think," he continued, with the most silken deliberation, "I think—who did not continue to prefer me."

"Mr. Henry laid down his cards. He rose to his feet very softly, and seemed all the while like a person in deep thought. 'You coward!' he said gently, as if to himself. And then, with neither hurry nor any particular violence, he struck the Master in the mouth.

"The Master sprang to his feet like one transfigured; I had never seen the man so beautiful. 'A blow!' he cried. 'I would not take a blow from God Almighty!'

"'Lower your voice,' said Mr. Henry. 'Do you wish my father to interfere for you again?'

"'Gentlemen, gentlemen,' I cried, and sought to come between them.

"The Master caught me by the shoulder, held me at arm's length, and still addressing his brother: 'Do you know what this means?' said he.

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" 'It was the most deliberate act of my life,' says Mr. Henry.

" 'I must have blood, I must have blood for this,' says the Master.

" 'Please God it shall be yours,' said Mr. Henry; and he went to the wall and took down a pair of swords that hung there with others, naked. These he presented to the Master by the points. 'Mackellar shall see us play fair,' said Mr. Henry. 'I think it very needful.'

" 'You need insult me no more,' said the Master, taking one of the swords at random. 'I have hated you all my life.'

" 'My father is but newly gone to bed,' said Mr. Henry. 'We must go somewhere forth of the house.'

" 'There is an excellent place in the long shrubbery,' said the Master.

" 'Gentlemen,' said I, 'shame upon you both! Sons of the same mother, would you turn against the life she gave you?'

" 'Even so, Mackellar,' said Mr. Henry, with the same perfect quietude of manner he had shown throughout.

" 'It is what I will prevent,' said I.

" 'And now here is a blot upon my life. At these words of mine the Master turned his blade against my bosom; I saw the light run along the steel; and I threw up my arms and fell to my knees before him on the floor. 'No, no,' I cried, like a baby.

" 'We shall have no more trouble with him,' said

the Master. 'It is a good thing to have a coward in the house.'

" 'We must have light,' said Mr. Henry, as though there had been no interruption.

" 'This trembler can bring a pair of candles,' said the Master.

"To my shame, be it said, I was still so blinded with the flashing of that bare sword that I volunteered to bring a lantern.

" 'We do not need a l-l-lantern,' says the Master, mocking me. 'There is no breath of air. Come, get to your feet, take a pair of lights, and go before. I am close behind with this—' making the blade glitter as he spoke.

"I took up the candlesticks and went before them, steps that I would give my hand to recall; but a coward is a slave at the best; and even as I went, my teeth smote each other in my mouth. It was as he had said: there was no breath stirring; a windless stricture of frost had bound the air; and as we went forth in the shine of the candles, the blackness was like a roof over our heads. Never a word was said; there was never a sound but the creaking of our steps along the frozen path. The cold of the night fell about me like a bucket of water; I shook as I went with more than terror; but my companions, bare-headed like myself, and fresh from the warm hall, appeared not even conscious of the change.

" 'Here is the place,' said the Master. 'Set down the candles.'

"I did as he bid me, and presently the flames went up, as steady as in a chamber, in the midst of the frosted trees, and I beheld these two brothers take their places.

" 'The light is something in my eyes,' said the Master.

" 'I will give you every advantage,' replied Mr. Henry, shifting his ground, 'for I think you are about to die.' He spoke rather sadly than otherwise, yet there was a ring in his voice.

" 'Henry Durie,' said the Master, 'two words before I begin. You are a fencer, you can hold a foil; you little know what a change it makes to hold a sword! And by that I know you are to fall. But see how strong is my situation! If you fall, I shift out of this country to where my money is before me. If I fall, where are you? My father, your wife—who is in love with me, as you very well know—your child even, who prefers me to yourself:—how will these avenge me! Had you thought of that, dear Henry?' He looked at his brother with a smile; then made a fencing-room salute.

"Never a word said Mr. Henry, but saluted too, and the swords rang together.

"I am no judge of the play; my head, besides, was gone with cold and fear and horror; but it seems that Mr. Henry took and kept the upper hand from the engagement, crowding in upon his foe with a contained and glowing fury. Nearer and nearer he crept upon the man, till of a sudden the Master leaped back with a little sobbing oath; and I be-

lieve the movement brought the light once more against his eyes. To it they went again, on the fresh ground; but now methought closer, Mr. Henry pressing more outrageously, the Master beyond doubt with shaken confidence. For it is beyond doubt he now recognised himself for lost, and had some taste of the cold agony of fear; or he had never attempted the foul stroke. I cannot say I followed it, my untrained eye was never quick enough to seize details, but it appears he caught his brother's blade with his left hand, a practise not permitted. Certainly Mr. Henry only saved himself by leaping on one side; as certainly the Master, lunging in the air, stumbled on his knee, and before he could move the sword was through his body.

"I cried out with a stifled scream, and ran in; but the body was already fallen to the ground, where it writhed a moment like a trodden worm, and then lay motionless.

" 'Look at his left hand,' said Mr. Henry.

" 'It is all bloody,' said I.

" 'On the inside?' said he.

" 'It is cut on the inside,' said I.

" 'I thought so,' said he, and turned his back.

"I opened the man's clothes; the heart was quite still, it gave not a flutter.

" 'God forgive us, Mr. Henry!' said I. 'He is dead.'

" 'Dead?' he repeated, a little stupidly; and then with a rising tone, 'Dead? dead?' says he, and suddenly casts his bloody sword upon the ground.

"'What must we do?' said I. 'Be yourself, sir. It is too late now: you must be yourself.'

"He turned and stared at me. 'Oh, Mackellar!' says he, and put his face in his hands.

"I plucked him by the coat. 'For God's sake, for all our sakes, be more courageous!' said I. 'What must we do?'

"He showed me his face with the same stupid stare. 'Do?' says he. And with that his eye fell on the body, and 'Oh!' he cries out, with his hand to his brow, as if he had never remembered; and, turning from me, made off towards the house of Durrishdeer at a strange stumbling run.

"I stood a moment mused; then it seemed to me my duty lay most plain on the side of the living; and I ran after him, leaving the candles on the frosty ground and the body lying in their light under the trees. But run as I pleased, he had the start of me, and was got into the house, and up to the hall, where I found him standing before the fire with his face once more in his hands, and as he so stood he visibly shuddered.

"'Mr. Henry, Mr. Henry,' I said, 'this will be the ruin of us all.'

"'What is this that I have done?' cries he, and then looking upon me with a countenance that I shall never forget, 'Who is to tell the old man?' he said.

"The word knocked at my heart; but it was no time for weakness. I went and poured him out a glass of brandy. 'Drink that,' said I, 'drink it



down.' I forced him to swallow it like a child; and, being still perished with the cold of the night, I followed his example.

" 'It has to be told, Mackellar,' said he. 'It must be told.' And he fell suddenly in a seat—my old lord's seat by the chimney-side—and was shaken with dry sobs.

"Dismay came upon my soul; it was plain there was no help in Mr. Henry. 'Well,' said I, 'sit there, and leave all to me.' And taking a candle in my hand, I set forth out of the room in the dark house. There was no movement; I must suppose that all had gone unobserved; and I was now to consider how to smuggle through the rest with the like secrecy. It was no hour for scruples; and I opened my lady's door without so much as a knock, and passed boldly in.

" 'There is some calamity happened,' she cried, sitting up in bed.

" 'Madam,' said I, 'I will go forth again into the passage; and do you get as quickly as you can into your clothes. There is much to be done.'

"She troubled me with no questions, nor did she keep me waiting. Ere I had time to prepare a word of that which I must say to her, she was on the threshold signing me to enter.

" 'Madam,' said I, 'if you cannot be very brave, I must go elsewhere; for if no one helps me to-night, there is an end of the house of Durrisdeer.'

" 'I am very courageous,' said she; and she looked

at me with a sort of smile, very painful to see, but very brave too.

“‘It has come to a duel,’ said I.

“‘A duel?’ she repeated. ‘A duel! Henry and—’

“‘And the Master,’ said I. ‘Things have been borne so long, things of which you know nothing, which you would not believe if I should tell. But to-night it went too far, and when he insulted you—’

“‘Stop,’ said she. ‘He? Who?’

“‘Oh! madam,’ cried I, my bitterness breaking forth, ‘do you ask me such a question? Indeed, then, I may go elsewhere for help; there is none here!’

“‘I do not know in what I have offended you,’ said she. ‘Forgive me; put me out of this suspense.’

“But I dared not tell her yet; I felt not sure of her; and at the doubt, and under the sense of impotence it brought with it, I turned on the poor woman with something near to anger.

“‘Madam,’ said I, ‘we are speaking of two men: one of them insulted you, and you ask me which. I will help you to the answer. With one of these men you have spent all your hours: has the other reproached you? To one you have been always kind; to the other, as God sees me and judges between us two, I think not always: has his love ever failed you? To-night one of these two men told the other, in my hearing—the hearing of a hired

stranger,—that you were in love with him. Before I say one word, you shall answer your own question: Which was it? Nay, madam, you shall answer me another: If it has come to this dreadful end, whose fault is it?

"She stared at me like one dazzled. 'Good God!' she said once, in a kind of bursting exclamation; and then a second time in a whisper to herself: 'Great God!—In the name of mercy, Mackellar, what is wrong?' she cried. 'I am made up; I can hear all.'

" 'You are not fit to hear,' said I. 'Whatever it was, you shall say first it was your fault.'

" 'Oh!' she cried, with a gesture of wringing her hands, 'this man will drive me mad! Can you not put *me* out of your thoughts?'

" 'I think not once of you,' I cried. 'I think of none but my dear unhappy master.'

" 'Ah!' she cried, with her hand to her heart, 'is Henry dead?'

" 'Lower your voice,' said I. 'The other.'

"I saw her sway like something stricken by the wind; and I know not whether in cowardice or misery, turned aside and looked upon the floor. 'These are dreadful tidings,' said I at length, when her silence began to put me in some fear; 'and you and I behove to be the more bold if the house is to be saved.' Still she answered nothing. 'There is Miss Katharine, besides,' I added; 'unless we bring this matter through her inheritance is like to be of shame.'

"I do not know if it was the thought of her child or the naked word shame, that gave her deliverance; at least, I had no sooner spoken than a sound passed her lips, the like of it I never heard; it was as though she had lain buried under a hill and sought to move that burthen. And the next moment she had found a sort of voice.

" 'It was a fight,' she whispered. 'It was not—?' and she paused upon the word.

" 'It was a fair fight on my dear master's part,' said I. 'As for the other, he was slain in the very act of a foul stroke.'

" 'Not now!' she cried.

" 'Madam,' said I, 'hatred of that man glows in my bosom like a burning fire; ay, even now he is dead. God knows, I would have stopped the fighting, had I dared. It is my shame I did not. But when I saw him fall, if I could have spared one thought from pitying of my master, it had been to exult in that deliverance.'

"I do not know if she marked; but her next words were, 'My lord?'

" 'That shall be my part,' said I.

" 'You will not speak to him as you have to me?' she asked.

" 'Madam,' said I, 'have you not some one else to think of? Leave my lord to me.'

" 'Some one else?' she repeated.

" 'Your husband,' said I. She looked at me with a countenance illegible. 'Are you going to turn your back on him?' I asked.

"Still she looked at me; then her hand went to her heart again. 'No,' said she.

" 'God bless you for that word!' I said. 'Go to him now, where he sits in the hall; speak to him—it matters not what you say; give him your hand; say, 'I know all';—if God gives you grace enough, say, 'Forgive me.'

" 'God strengthen you, and make you merciful,' said she. 'I will go to my husband.'

" 'Let me light you there,' said I, taking up the candle.

" 'I will find my way in the dark,' she said, with a shudder, and I think the shudder was at me.

"So we separated—she downstairs to where a little light glimmered in the hall-door, I along the passage to my lord's room. It seems hard to say why, but I could not burst in on the old man as I could on the young woman; with whatever reluctance, I must knock. But his old slumbers were light, or perhaps he slept not; and at the first summons I was bidden enter.

"He, too, sat up in bed; very aged and bloodless he looked; and whereas he had a certain largeness of appearance when dressed for daylight, he now seemed frail and little, and his face (the wig being laid aside) not bigger than a child's. This daunted me; nor less, the haggard surmise of misfortune in his eye. Yet his voice was even peaceful as he inquired my errand. I set my candle down upon a chair, leaned on the bed-foot, and looked at him.

" 'Lord Durrisdeer,' said I, 'it is very well known to you that I am a partisan in your family.'

" 'I hope we are none of us partisans,' said he. 'That you love my son sincerely, I have always been glad to recognise.'

" 'Oh! my lord, we are past the hour of these civilities,' I replied. 'If we are to save anything out of the fire, we must look the fact in its bare countenance. A partisan I am; partisans we have all been; it is as a partisan that I am here in the middle of the night to plead before you. Hear me; before I go, I will tell you why.'

" 'I would always hear you, Mr. Mackellar,' said he, 'and that at any hour, whether of the day or night, for I would be always sure you had a reason. You spoke once before to very proper purpose; I have not forgotten that.'

" 'I am here to plead the cause of my master,' I said. 'I need not tell you how he acts. You know how he is placed. You know with what generosity he has always met your other—met your wishes,' I corrected myself, stumbling at that name of son. 'You know—you must know—what he has suffered—what he has suffered about his wife.'

" 'Mr. Mackellar!' cried my lord, rising in bed like a bearded lion.

" 'You said you would hear me,' I continued. 'What you do not know, what you should know, one of the things I am here to speak of, is the persecution he must bear in private. Your back is not turned before one whom I dare not name to you falls upon him with the most unfeeling taunts; twits him—pardon me, my lord—twits him with your

partiality, calls him Jacob, calls him clown, pursues him with ungenerous raillery, not to be borne by man. And let but one of you appear, instantly he changes; and my master must smile and courtesy to the man who has been feeding him with insults; I know, for I have shared in some of it, and I tell you the life is insupportable. All these months it has endured; it began with the man's landing; it was by the name of Jacob that my master was greeted the first night.'

"My lord made a movement as if to throw aside the clothes and rise. 'If there be any truth in this—' said he.

"'Do I look like a man lying?' I interrupted, checking him with my hand.

"'You should have told me at first,' he said.

"'Ah, my lord! indeed I should, and you may well hate the face of this unfaithful servant!' I cried.

"'I will take order,' said he, 'at once.' And again made the movement to rise.

"Again I checked him. 'I have not done,' said I. 'Would God I had! All this my dear unfortunate patron has endured without help or countenance. Your own best word, my lord, was only gratitude. Oh, but he was your son, too! He had no other father. He was hated in the country, God knows how unjustly. He had a loveless marriage. He stood on all hands without affection or support—dear, generous, ill-fated, noble heart!'

"'Your tears do you much honour and me much shame,' says my lord, with a palsied trembling. 'But

you do me some injustice, Henry has been ever dear to me, very dear. James (I do not deny it, Mr. Mackellar), James is perhaps dearer; you have not seen my James in quite a favourable light; he has suffered under his misfortunes; and we can only remember how great and how unmerited these were. And even now his is the more affectionate nature. But I will not speak of him. All that you say of Henry is most true; I do not wonder, I know him to be very magnanimous; you will say I trade upon the knowledge? It is possible; there are dangerous virtues: virtues that tempt the encroacher. Mr. Mackellar, I will make it up to him; I will take order with all this. I have been weak; and, what is worse, I have been dull.'

" 'I must not hear you blame yourself, my lord, with that which I have yet to tell upon my conscience,' I replied. 'You have not been weak; you have been abused by a devilish dissembler. You saw yourself how he had deceived you in the matter of his danger; he has deceived you throughout in every step of his career. I wish to pluck him from your heart; I wish to force your eyes upon your other son; ah, you have a son there!'

" 'No, no,' said he, 'two sons—I have two sons.'

"I made some gesture of despair that struck him; he looked at me with a changed face. 'There is much worse behind?' he asked, his voice dying as it rose upon the question.

" 'Much worse,' I answered. 'This night he said these words to Mr. Henry: "I have never known a



woman who did not prefer me to you, and I think who did not continue to prefer me.”’

“‘I will hear nothing against my daughter,’ he cried; and from his readiness to stop me in this direction, I conclude his eyes were not so dull as I had fancied, and he had looked not without anxiety upon the siege of Mrs. Henry.

“‘I think not of blaming her,’ cried I. ‘It is not that. These words were said in my hearing to Mr. Henry; and if you find them not yet plain enough, these others but a little after: “Your wife who is in love with me.”’

“‘They have quarrelled?’ he said.

“I nodded.

“‘I must fly to them,’ he said, beginning once again to leave his bed.

“‘No, no!’ I cried, holding forth my hands.

“‘You do not know,’ said he. ‘These are dangerous words.’

“‘Will nothing make you understand, my lord?’ said I.

“His eyes besought me for the truth.

“I flung myself on my knees by the bedside. ‘Oh, my lord,’ cried I, ‘think on him you have left; think of this poor sinner whom you begot, whom your wife bore to you, whom we have none of us strengthened as we could; think of him, not of yourself; he is the other sufferer—think of him! That is the door for sorrow—Christ’s door, God’s door: oh! it stands open. Think of him, even as he thought of you. *“Who is to tell the old man?”*—these were his

words. It was for that I came; that is why I am here pleading at your feet.'

" 'Let me get up,' he cried, thrusting me aside, and was on his feet before myself. His voice shook like a sail in the wind, yet he spoke with a good loudness; his face was like the snow, but his eyes were steady and dry. 'Here is too much speech,' said he. 'Where was it?'

" 'In the shrubbery,' said I.

" 'And Mr. Henry?' he asked. And when I had told him he knotted his old face in thought.

" 'And Mr. James?' says he:

" 'I have left him lying,' said I, 'beside the candles.'

" 'Candles?' he cried. And with that he ran to the window, opened it, and looked abroad. 'It might be spied from the road.'

" 'Where none goes by at such an hour,' I objected.

" 'It makes no matter,' he said. 'One might. Hark!' cries he. 'What is that?'

" 'It was the sound of men very guardedly rowing in the bay; and I told him so.

" 'The freetraders,' said my lord. 'Run at once, Mackellar; put these candles out. I will dress in the meanwhile; and when you return we can debate on what is wisest.'

"I groped my way downstairs, and out at the door. From quite a far way off a sheen was visible, making points of brightness in the shrubbery; in so black a night it might have been remarked for miles;

and I blamed myself bitterly for my incaution. How much more sharply when I reached the place! One of the candlesticks was overthrown, and that taper quenched. The other burned steadily by itself, and made a broad space of light upon the frosted ground. All within that circle seemed, by the force of contrast and the overhanging blackness, brighter than by day. And there was the bloodstain in the midst; and a little farther off Mr. Henry's sword, the pomel of which was of silver; but of the body, not a trace. My heart thumped upon my ribs, the hair stirred upon my scalp, as I stood there staring—so strange was the sight, so dire the fears it awakened. I looked right and left; the ground was so hard, it told no story. I stood and listened till my ears ached, but the night was hollow about me like an empty church; not even a ripple stirred upon the shore; it seemed you might have heard a pin drop in the county.

"I put the candle out, and the blackness fell about me groping dark; it was like a crowd surrounding me; and I went back to the house of Durriseer, with my chin upon my shoulder, startling, as I went, with craven suppositions. In the door a figure moved to meet me, and I had near screamed with terror ere I recognised Mrs. Henry.

" 'Have you told him?' says she.

" 'It was he who sent me,' said I. 'It's gone. But why are you here?'

" 'It is gone!' she repeated. 'What is gone?'

" 'The body,' said I. 'Why are you not with your husband?'

"'Gone?' said she. 'You cannot have looked. Come back.'

"'There is no light now,' said I. 'I dare not.'

"'I can see in the dark. I have been standing here so long—so long,' said she. 'Come, give me your hand.'

"We returned to the shrubbery hand in hand, and to the fatal place.

"'Take care of the blood,' said I.

"'Blood?' she cried, and started violently back.

"'I suppose it will be,' said I. 'I am like a blind man.'

"'No,' said she, 'nothing! Have you not dreamed?'

"'Ah, would to God we had!' cried I.

"She spied the sword, picked it up, and seeing the blood, let it fall again with her hands thrown wide. 'Ah!' she cried. And then, with an instant courage, handled it the second time, and [*sought to*] thrust it to the hilt into the frozen ground. 'I will take it back and clean it properly,' says she, and again looked about her on all sides. 'It cannot be that he was dead?' she added.

"'There was no flutter of his heart,' said I, and then remembering: 'Why are you not with your husband?'

"'It is no use,' said she; 'he will not speak to me.'

"'Not speak to you?' I repeated. 'Oh! you have not tried.'

"'You have a right to doubt me,' she replied, with a gentle dignity.

"At this, for the first time, I was seized with sorrow for her. 'God knows, madam,' I cried, 'God knows I am not so hard as I appear; on this dreadful night who can veneer his words? But I am a friend to all who are not Henry Durie's enemies.'

" 'It is hard, then, you should hesitate about his wife,' said she.

"I saw all at once, like the rending of a veil, how nobly she had borne this unnatural calamity, and how generously my reproaches.

" 'We must go back and tell this to my lord,' said I.

" 'Him I cannot face,' she cried.

" 'You will find him the least moved of all of us,' said I.

" 'And yet I cannot face him,' said she.

" 'Well,' said I, 'you can return to Mr. Henry; I will see my lord.'

"As we walked back, I bearing the candlesticks, she the sword—a strange burthen for that woman—she had another thought. 'Should we tell Henry?' she asked.

" 'Let my lord decide,' said I.

"My lord was nearly dressed when I came to his chamber. He heard me with a frown. 'The free-traders,' said he. 'But whether dead or alive?'

" 'I thought him—' said I, and paused, ashamed of the word.

" 'I know; but you may very well have been in error. Why should they remove him if not living?' he asked. 'Oh! here is a great door of hope. It

must be given out that he departed—as he came—without any note of preparation. We must save all scandal.'

"I saw he had fallen, like the rest of us, to think mainly of the house. Now that all the living members of the family were plunged in irremediable sorrow, it was strange how we turned to that conjoint abstraction of the family itself, and sought to bolster up the airy nothing of its reputation: not the Duries only, but the hired steward himself.

" 'Are we to tell Mr. Henry?' I asked him.

" 'I will see,' said he. 'I am going first to visit him; then I go forth with you to view the shrubbery and consider.'

"We went downstairs into the hall. Mr. Henry sat by the table with his head upon his hand, like a man of stone. His wife stood a little back from him, her hand at her mouth; it was plain she could not move him. My old lord walked very steadily to where his son was sitting; he had a steady countenance, too, but methought a little cold. When he was come quite up, he held out both his hands and said, 'My son!'

"With a broken, strangled cry, Mr. Henry leaped up and fell on his father's neck, crying and weeping, the most pitiful sight that ever a man witnessed. 'Oh! father,' he cried, 'you know I loved him; you know I loved him in the beginning; I could have died for him—you know that! I would have given my life for him and you. Oh! say you know that. Oh! say you can forgive me. O father, father,

what have I done—what have I done? And we used to be bairns together!’ and wept and sobbed, and fondled the old man, and clutched him about the neck, with the passion of a child in terror.

“And then he caught sight of his wife (you would have thought for the first time), where she stood weeping to hear him, and in a moment had fallen at her knees. ‘And O my lass,’ he cried, ‘you must forgive me, too! Not your husband—I have only been the ruin of your life. But you knew me when I was a lad; there was no harm in Henry Durie then; he meant aye to be a friend to you. It’s him—it’s the old bairn that played with you—oh, can ye never, never forgive him?’

“Throughout all this my lord was like a cold, kind spectator with his wits about him. At the first cry, which was indeed enough to call the house about us, he had said to me over his shoulder, ‘Close the door.’ And now he nodded to himself.

“‘We may leave him to his wife now,’ says he. ‘Bring a light, Mr. Mackellar.’

“Upon my going forth again with my lord, I was aware of a strange phenomenon; for though it was quite dark, and the night not yet old, methought I smelt the morning. At the same time there went a tossing through the branches of the evergreens, so that they sounded like a quiet sea, and the air puffed at times against our faces, and the flame of the candle shook. We made the more speed, I believe, being surrounded by this bustle; visited the scene of the duel, where my lord looked upon the

blood with stoicism; and passing farther on toward the landing-place, came at last upon some evidences of the truth. For, first of all, where there was a pool across the path, the ice had been trodden in, plainly by more than one man's weight; next, and but a little farther, a young tree was broken, and down by the landing-place, where the traders' boats were usually beached, another stain of blood marked where the body must have been infallibly set down to rest the bearers.

"This stain we set ourselves to wash away with the sea water, carrying it in my lord's hat; and as we were thus engaged there came up a sudden moaning gust and left us instantly benighted.

"'It will come to snow,' says my lord; 'and the best thing that we could hope. Let us go back now; we can do nothing in the dark.'

"As we went houseward, the wind being again subsided, we were aware of a strong pattering noise about us in the night; and when we issued from the shelter of the trees, we found it raining smartly.

"Throughout the whole of this, my lord's clearness of mind, no less than his activity of body, had not ceased to minister to my amazement. He set the crown upon it in the council we held on our return. The freetraders had certainly secured the Master, though whether dead or alive we were still left to our conjectures; the rain would, long before day, wipe out all marks of the transaction; by this we must profit. The Master had unexpectedly come after the fall of night; it must now be given out



he had as suddenly departed before the break of day; and, to make all this plausible, it now only remained for me to mount into the man's chamber, and pack and conceal his baggage. True, we still lay at the discretion of the traders; but that was the incurable weakness of our guilt.

"I heard him, as I said, with wonder, and hastened to obey. Mr. and Mrs. Henry were gone from the hall; my lord, for warmth's sake, hurried to his bed; there was still no sign of stir among the servants, and as I went up the tower stair, and entered the dead man's room, a horror of solitude weighed upon my mind. To my extreme surprise, it was all in the disorder of departure. Of his three portmanteaux, two were already locked; the third lay open and near full. At once there flashed upon me some suspicion of the truth. The man had been going, after all; he had but waited upon Crail, as Crail waited upon the wind; early in the night the seamen had perceived the weather changing; the boat had come to give notice of the change and call the passenger aboard, and the boat's crew had stumbled on him lying in his blood. Nay, and there was more behind. This prearranged departure shed some light upon his inconceivable insult of the night before; it was a parting shot, hatred being no longer checked by policy. And, for another thing, the nature of that insult, and the conduct of Mrs. Henry, pointed to one conclusion, which I have never verified, and can now never verify until the great assize—the conclusion that he had at last forgotten

himself, had gone too far in his advances, and had been rebuffed. It can never be verified, as I say; but as I thought of it that morning among his baggage, the thought was sweet to me like honey.

"Into the open portmanteau I dipped a little ere I closed it. The most beautiful lace and linen, many suits of those fine plain clothes in which he loved to appear; a book or two, and those of the best, Cæsar's *Commentaries*, a volume of Mr. Hobbes, the *Henriade* of M. de Voltaire, a book upon the Indies, one on the mathematics, far beyond where I have studied: these were what I observed with very mingled feelings. But in the open portmanteau, no papers of any description. This set me musing. It was possible the man was dead; but, since the traders had carried him away, not likely. It was possible he might still die of his wound; but it was also possible he might not. And in this latter case I was determined to have the means of some defence.

"One after another I carried his portmanteaux to a loft in the top of the house which we kept locked; went to my own room for my keys, and, returning to the loft, had the gratification to find two that fitted pretty well. In one of the portmanteaux there was a shagreen letter-case, which I cut open with my knife; and thenceforth (so far as any credit went) the man was at my mercy. Here was a vast deal of gallant correspondence, chiefly of his Paris days; and, what was more to the purpose, here were the copies of his own reports to the English Secretary,

and the originals of the Secretary's answers: a most damning series: such as to publish would be to wreck the Master's honour and to set a price upon his life. I chuckled to myself as I ran through the documents; I rubbed my hands, I sang aloud in my glee. Day found me at the pleasing task; nor did I then remit my diligence, except in so far as I went to the window—looked out for a moment, to see the frost quite gone, the world turned black again, and the rain and the wind driving in the bay—and to assure myself that the lugger was gone from its anchorage, and the Master (whether dead or alive) now tumbling on the Irish Sea.

"It is proper I should add in this place the very little I have subsequently angled out upon the doings of that night. It took me a long while to gather it; for we dared not openly ask, and the freetraders regarded me with enmity, if not with scorn. It was near six months before we even knew for certain that the man survived; and it was years before I learned from one of Crail's men, turned publican on his ill-gotten gain, some particulars which smack to me of truth. It seems the traders found the Master struggled on one elbow, and now staring round him, and now gazing at the candle or at his hand which was all bloodied, like a man stupid. Upon their coming, he would seem to have found his mind, bade them carry him aboard, and hold their tongues; and on the captain asking how he had come in such a pickle, replied with a burst of passionate swearing, and incontinently fainted. They

held some debate, but they were momentarily looking for a wind, they were highly paid to smuggle him to France, and did not care to delay. Besides which, he was well enough liked by these abominable wretches: they supposed him under capital sentence, knew not in what mischief he might have got his wound, and judged it a piece of good nature to remove him out of the way of danger. So he was taken aboard, recovered on the passage over, and was set ashore a convalescent at the Havre de Grace. What is truly notable: he said not a word to any one of the duel, and not a trader knows to this day in what quarrel, or by the hand of what adversary, he fell. With any other man I should have set this down to natural decency; with him, to pride. He could not bear to avow, perhaps even to himself, that he had been vanquished by one whom he had so much insulted and whom he so cruelly despised.”  
 —*The Master of Ballantrae.* ,

This I believe to be the finest passage in Stevenson, but beyond this and certain scenes of picturesque force, we look vainly for any comprehensive thought, such as Victor Hugo, or Dumas, or several of our present romancers display in the management of their plot—"a large design, shadowing the complexity of that game of consequences to which we all sit down, the hanger-back not least." Interrelating incident and character throughout a long story was a faculty of thought very frequently denied to Stevenson. He sought to make up for its lack by vivid-

ness of the moment, and did not realize that of the long succession of moments in a novel, none can have its proper vividness if the succession points not toward a fuller clarity.

It is possible that in *The Master* a great novel was spoiled for the sake of dreaming out a fantastic tale of "many lands." In *Hermiston* it looks as if a powerful drama, or at least a powerful melodrama, might have been worked out had Stevenson lived. Many critics see in the book signs of greater genius than elsewhere in Stevenson, and of the ambitiousness of the matter there is no question. The crisis of the story was to be the trial of his own son Archie for murder by Weir of Hermiston, the famous "hanging judge"—a nightmare situation obviously, but one to which Stevenson's powers of dramatic compression, estimated by some of his short stories, and by scenes between the two Durrisdeers in *The Master*, would have been equal. In preparation, the story opens with a vivid narrative showing the temperamental difference between the father and the son. This theme, which played so large a part in Stevenson's own life, is prominent in several of his other tales, appearing in *The Wrecker*, "The Story of a Lie," and "The Adventures of John Nicholson"; but in *Hermiston* alone is it seriously treated. Elsewhere it is material for farce; and whether in *Hermiston* it might not very probably have become hyper-melodramatic at the end, is a grave question.

There is some good reading at the beginning of

the novel, where the "hanging judge" is having his portrait drawn for us, especially that scene, in typical sinister humor, in which the judge's servant, Kirstie, goes out along the road to meet him with the news that his wife has just died. But aside from a few masterly fragments like this, the character of the judge, who is to play such a terrible part in the issue of the story, is rather thinly made out. He fades rather than looms in the background, and, by the sixtieth page, after which we hear no more of him at all, he is already a mere stock figure—religion, drink, dourness—typical perhaps, but also a parody.

Shortly begins Archie's flirtation with young Kirstie which is to cause all Archie's trouble. Several of the boy and girl scenes here show the influence of Meredith, and, indeed, the book might have been a sort of Calvinistic, dourly melodramatic *Feverel*. Stevenson never learned the art of interweaving skilfully, as Meredith did, the various threads of his story. Some sixty pages are given up to the flirtation with young Kirstie into which no further development of the first motive, of father and son, enters. Now at page one hundred twenty-seven, Innes arrives, and much time must be devoted to the character of Archie's friend who is to bring the plot back to the judge. For Innes is obviously the young seducer; Kirstie will be his victim; Archie will kill him; the judge will try Archie. Archie's relations with Innes are made interesting by a clever bit of psychology.

Archie is enough like his father that his treatment of Innes resembles his father's treatment of himself. The fragment ends with a necessary, but utterly mechanical, alienation scene between Archie and young Kirstie. The tale as we have it is only a fragment; therefore one is debarred from passing any conclusive judgment on the management of the plot, and the seeming fault of totally neglecting the chief character, Weir of Hermiston himself, after the first sixty pages, might, perhaps, have later been trammelled up.

Of Stevenson's romances, *Weir of Hermiston*, like *St. Ives*, was not finished, and *The Master of Ballantrae* comes by its particular end only because the author happened to be living at Saranac when he began to write it and had made up his mind arbitrarily that it should somehow end in that locality. These books, together with *Prince Otto* and *The Wrecker*, illustrate the flow and the manifold possibilities of Stevenson's imagination and also his one great impossibility, the impossibility of conducting a long romance to a fascinating, inevitable end. For even a romance may very well have such an end, and in so far outdo the dreams of sleep which usually cheat us of this satisfaction. As we have already observed, Stevenson's greatest fault as a craftsman is that he was all his life the prey of hints and suggestions rather than the master of completed ideas, and in these books his imagination is too often of the over-impressionable instead of the creative type. He seems to have been much like a

boy starting on his first journey, to whom expectation is the keenest part of the pleasure, and who does not wish many instructions about how he shall proceed for fear of spoiling the fun of finding the way by himself. Obviously in regard to *The Master*, *Hermiston*, *The Wrecker*, and *Prince Otto*, there was no detailed plan in Stevenson's mind even when he was half-way through the story. Incidents pile up in the wrong places and block progress, certain threads are quite forgotten or picked up again only at random. In *Prince Otto*, the peasant and Ottilia are let lie, though excellent figures to return to, and the Prince might perfectly well have gone back to them for some sort of *finale* when he left the court. Captain Trent, in *The Wrecker*, a central figure in the main plot, is utterly neglected for two hundred pages at the end. This is the flimsiness and not the fitness of romance.

This general wandering geography of so many of Stevenson's plots is a direct reflection of his own existence. He himself doubtless found it as interesting to wander in fiction as in the geography of life, and to find himself, driven hither and thither by no inevitable agencies, winding up his tale where he, the author, happened at the moment to be. And I am, of course, aware that such whimsicality is the trait supposed to appeal most to any reader of a true romatical and roving fancy; but whimsicality was *intended* in but one of these books. In all but *The Wrecker* Stevenson was trying to write well-constructed romance, untinged by farce, and the



farce creeps in in spite of him, or perhaps, rather, because it was an inevitable part of his own nature.

In a medley like *The Wrecker* the element of farce is intentionally predominant. Romance occupies the two hundred pages in the middle of the book; the other three hundred and fifty being a series of elaborate burlesques on the detective story, on methods of American advertising, on English family pride, on the man of the world, or on any matter that happened to float into the writer's imagination. In *The Wrecker* the gleeful irresponsibility of Stevensonian humor outstrips any possible attempt at serious criticism. It is all very cheap nonsense or all very good fun, as you happen to feel at the moment. If the story had a romantic purpose in its inception—the first ten pages have a ring that echoes in the ear—this is abruptly forgotten till, on nearing page two hundred, the phantom plot, which you may have been vainly pursuing from the Latin Quarter to California, again turns up. For two hundred pages there is a stirring sea adventure with a magnificent storm and a guano island, largely done by Lloyd Osbourne, and other matters full of unequaled terror. Toward page four hundred this again fizzles out and the farce resumes full sway. Few readers can have a grain of common sense left at the end of this amazing tale, and certainly the authors, if one should take them in earnest, are guilty of having but the haziest notion from chapter to chapter of what they were intending to do or, at the end, of what they had done.

In the Epilogue to *Will Lowe*, the authors make a defense of the structure of this "modern" yarn, "full of details of our barbaric manners and unstable morals;—full of the need and the lust of money, so that there is scarce a page in which the dollars do not jingle;—full of the unrest and movement of our century, so that the reader is hurried from place to place and sea to sea, and the book is less a romance than a panorama;—in the end, as blood-bespattered as an epic." The authors hoped that this panoramic structure would produce a new illusion of reality; but it does not work out that way for most readers. "Hurried from place to place and sea to sea," the mind of the reader can no more receive an impression of reality than in the vagaries of a fantastic dream; and as for the "tone of a novel of manners and experience," in which the authors assert their epic starts, who could be beguiled so far? *The Wrecker* is a commentary on Stevenson's other books. Its ground for success is the humorous emphasis of the very traits which elsewhere mar his serious efforts—the dislocations, the arbitrary arrangement of scenes, the lack of foresight. Here, they are a part of the fun. They actually carry us along.

Besides *The Wrecker*, there is *Prince Otto*, *The Dynamiter*, and *The New Arabian Nights*, of one imagination all compact—romance, satire, farce, almost indistinguishably mingled.

*Prince Otto*, a rather spiritless *tour de force* containing two or three amusing puppets endowed with

a lingo, unquestionably has the germ of an idea in it. Stevenson intended to create a mock-government, a mirror for politicians, and a guide to vanity for all serious souls. In the principality of Grünewald, Otto, a hesitating socialist, can alone see things in proportion. He has had a glimpse of the world and has heard the laughter of the people. The rest of his ridiculous court are puppets on the wires of illusion. But, much like Hamlet, he is full of the vanities himself. That is why he understands them so well, and why he enjoys life like a play and is incapable of grasping the wand that would destroy the spell. It has often been said that Stevenson has described himself, or a mixture of himself and his cousin Bob, in Otto. The character possibly has that curious interest for some readers; but Otto does not fill the tale with reality as the character of Jim Hawkins and that of Alan Breck fill their respective extravaganzas. If the fantastic Prince is Stevenson, then Stevenson is nothing but a trick of styles. For surely Otto, no more than Seraphina or Madame von Rosen, *walks* in the story; he is a figment suitable only for a kind of false fairy-land. In spite of what Stevenson says in the dedication about General Braddock, when defeated in America, promising himself to do better next time, the book is not one of the author's brave efforts.

To mix successfully romance, melodrama, farce, and satire is by no means an impossible feat when not too seriously undertaken. A great many of Stevenson's intimate friends were of the opinion

that he accomplished it essentially in his own personality. Indeed most of the character sketches in Mr. Hammerton's volume of *Stevensoniana* lead one to this view of the novelist's eccentric and vastly entertaining nature. His was a rare blend—

“A brilliant and romantic grace,  
A spirit intense and rare, with trace on trace  
Of passion, impudence, and energy.  
Valiant in velvet, light in ragged luck,  
Most vain, most generous, sternly critical,  
Buffoon and poet, lover and sensualist:  
A deal of Ariel, just a streak of Puck,  
Much Antony, of Hamlet most of all,  
And something of the Shorter-Catechist.”

So his friend Henley has described him, and somewhere, surely, he has himself put this mixture into fiction without forcing, without loss of humor. There are three places where I think you will find it. They do not represent Stevenson at his literary best, but perhaps they do represent his personal humor most truly. The stories of Desprez in “The Treasure of Franchard,” of Challoner and Sommerset in *The Dynamiter*, and of Prince Florizel in *The New Arabian Nights* are masterpieces of this composite character. They are Henley's old, intrepid, scornful Stevenson; they are Stevenson of Barbizon days with Bob, as his wife has described him, not belonging quite to his own century, and differing in some indefinable way both in appearance and character from the majority of mankind; they are the talka-

tive boisterous Stevenson, full of the lightest fancy and full of the most farcical fun. They are things to be read with a gleaming eye and a grin, for they contain the essence of Stevenson's bravado, of adventure for adventure's sake and folly for pure foolishness.

As you read about The Suicide Club, you can not suppress your nervous excitement, nor can you stop laughing hilariously. You are forced to adopt the Stevensonian manner and carry the thing off lightly. This is not Henley's "artist in morals," the "very nearly faultless monster," the "Seraph in Chocolate," but rather the "buffoon and poet."

Yet if this is the Stevenson whom Henley regretted to have lost, and whom all the more intimate of his critics seemed to have chiefly delighted in, it is not the Stevenson whom the next generation has accepted. For them Stevenson as a writer of fiction is always one of two people. He is the magician with the golden key to the palace of dreams in *Treasure Island* and in *Kidnapped*, or he is the romantic moralist whom Henley repudiates, the author of *Dr. Jekyll*, *The Ebb-tide*, and "The Isle of Voices." And I feel sure that the next generation is right. These are the original and durable parts of Stevenson. Farce and satire have been better done from Swift to Chesterton than Stevenson could do them; and Joseph Conrad and Maurice Hewlett have succeeded with the long romance where Stevenson failed for lack of thoughts or a good spy-glass. After so long a chapter, it is pos-

sibly disheartening to come to this conclusion—*Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* out of them all, to which some would add *The Master*, and to which we would all supply many favorite scenes from the other books.

These novels of Stevenson, taken all together, present a curious array—curious rather than impressive. The ten volumes on my shelves do not bid for comparison with any ten volumes of Scott, or Victor Hugo, or Dumas, or Conrad, in so far as they stand for adventure in the land of fancy, or in so far as they attempt a picture of society. They do not seem to encompass the region marked for exploration as those other volumes encompass it—*Rob Roy*, *Ninety-Three*, *The Black Tulip*, *Nostromo*, and the rest. These are the products of mature imaginations, and though Stevenson's imagination surpasses each of them in some respects, it is not as evenly extensive, it is not nearly so capable of filling out the expectations it arouses. Stevenson's imagination is suggestive, but not far-sighted. On the other hand, as one looks at this set of volumes, it brings memories of many marvelous shores and of mountain tops where Fancy has her abode, memories of supreme moments.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE MORAL FABLES

#### I

STEVENSON has the peculiar distinction of being a man of three books. At the mention of his name, it is not *Treasure Island* alone or *Virginibus Puerisque* alone, that comes instantly to mind; but *Treasure Island*, *Virginibus Puerisque*, and *Dr. Jekyll*. This is a peculiar distinction, because few authors are finally thought of with equal reference to three phases of their art. At the name of Thackeray the world answers *Vanity Fair* or *Esmond* or *Pendennis*, which are, after all, one and the same thing. If you say Dickens, the world announces a confusion of favorites which are all very closely related to one another. *Pickwick*, *Oliver Twist*, *Copperfield*, *A Christmas Carol*, are of one family; and even *A Tale of Two Cities* is a first cousin. George Meredith is the author of a great variety of novels, some remarkable poetry, and a few essays, all of which are conceived, as it were, from the same side of his mind—or better, in his whole mind, which is characterized by its strong

marking unity rather than by its entertaining versatility. A similar statement might be made concerning George Eliot or Thomas Hardy; and though Stevenson's mind has as well its marking unity, which I shall be at pains to point out, it is given to a more divergent variety of forms than is the case with these other writers.

From such considerations one should, however, beware of drawing a rule, of supposing that typical unity is a characteristic of the greater writers and that versatility is a characteristic of the less great. Schiller, Goethe, and Victor Hugo occur to one instantly as examples of versatile greatness; while on the other hand of second rate monotony are the examples of Charles Reade, Lever, and Marryat. But the whole matter, the rule and its exceptions, makes a comment to be emphasized. The fact that the first examples of versatile greatness which come to mind are apt to be Frenchmen or Germans rather than Englishmen, is worth noting. It leads us to reflect that Stevenson is one of the very few British authors of marked versatility who ranks well up in the scale—and it is perhaps to be recollected that he is a thorough Scot. Stevenson's essays place him beside Hazlitt and Lamb. His two or three successful romances are the classics of boyhood. His moral fables are in a realm of imagination, where he is alone in English letters. In so excellent a variety of criticisms, popular philosophy, short stories, romances, fables, and poetry, you will not find anybody in modern England to compare with



him, or hardly in Europe. But it is to such men as Anatole France, Jules Lemaitre, Hauptmann, and Bjørnsen that one turns for any similar excellence of variety among contemporary writers.

A peculiar pliancy of mood which, in his weaker moments, is almost that of the impersonator, and which, in his stronger moments, thoroughly corresponds to his own virile complexity, is the Stevensonian trait—three men or more in one. His works testify to it, and, as it appeared in daily intercourse, his friends never tired of remarking on it. Once while reading *Don Quixote*, Stevenson jumped to his feet and exclaimed that the book must have been written especially for him. Many of us perceive ourselves in that extravaganza; but I do not know that many people have so good a right as Stevenson to be overcome with the exactness of the characterization.

## II

So I believe that, in a not too literal sense, it is typical of Stevenson's genius that it should make its first wide appeal in a fable of multiple personality, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Stevenson's relation to this amazing tale has very usually been misunderstood. To many people the plot seems a sheer *tour de force*, or else the sort of thing that pops into a man's brain for no personal reason at all. That is, such people pretend that the conception is of the sort which does not belong naturally here rather

than there in the human mind, and imagine that some other writer might have developed it had it occurred to him. That it was first suggested to Stevenson in a dream is cited as argument in this view of the case. On the contrary *Dr. Jekyll* is one of Stevenson's most characteristic and intimate productions; and his dreaming the plot shows that it was especially personal, for in one sense, surely, a dream is the very essence of spontaneity. Besides this, there can be no doubt that Stevenson was intensely interested in what he calls the different men in us. He had already written "Markheim," a fable about the better self. Such subjects were matters of frequent conversation with him; and the suggestion of this particular dream of the Jekyll-Hyde transformation was all he needed to start him on a fresh illustration of the general thesis.

In the "Chapter on Dreams," while whimsically explaining his theory, already referred to, of the part which the subconsciousness plays in artistic production, he illustrates that theory by specific reference to *Dr. Jekyll*. He says he had long been trying to write a story on this subject of dual personality, and, after going about racking his brains for a plot, dreamed one night the scene of Jekyll at the window, and also a scene in which Hyde took the powder and underwent transformation in the presence of those pursuing him. All the rest of the tale he invented while awake, "although I think I can trace in much of it the manner of my Brownies." Thus the meaning of the tale is his, and "the cen-

tral idea of a voluntary change becoming involuntary." But "the business of the powders, which so many have censured, is, I am relieved to say, not mine at all but the Brownies'."

On the morning after Stevenson had this dream he started afresh on the tale and finished the first draft of thirty thousand words in three days. But in this, it appeared to his wife that he had not made the allegory clear, and he therefore rewrote it completely from a different point of view—a point of view that enabled him to see the mystery as a moral, and to make the moral the explanation of the mystery. This is the obvious secret and the hidden significance of the tale.

A great mystery story must mean something besides an exhibition of detective skill in exposing the mystery. It must mean something more than the opposition of strange characters and strange forces. Poe's tales, which are marvels of cleverness in creating the atmosphere, the rhythms, of strangeness, seek few meanings beyond those of nervous sensation; and a Poe tale with a moral would be an artistic contradiction. But the great mystery plot must have, besides an atmosphere of ominousness and besides details of action which peculiarly haunt the mind, an imaginative analysis to increase interest in the intellectual aspect of the plot and to guide the reader toward the mystery of its inner meaning. This mystery must reside actually in the plot and not be finally discovered to have evaporated in the "atmosphere." The meaning, the moral, and

the mystery must be one and the same; and yet an explanation of the mystery must in nowise dispel the atmosphere of mystery.

What then is the moral of *Dr. Jekyll*? Let us begin with the most obvious aspect of "the strange case." There are, says Stevenson, two men in us, a better and a worse, who find it convenience or policy, if permitted, to play two rôles. So long as the two men are kept distinct, each recognizing clearly which is which, moral corruption is not inevitable. But in some natures a point is reached sooner than is suspected where the better man finds himself automatically turning into the worse and this when he least of all desires it, when policy and convenience are directly against it. His nature, because it is double, slips from his single control. The man who allows the two sides of his nature to develop at will and who hopes to keep them apart, is soon forced ironically to use his better side merely as a shield for his worse side. That is, he becomes a hypocrite.

Now this moral plot of *Dr. Jekyll* is not extraneous to the narrative. It is not a tag at the end. For example, long before you have at all guessed what the relation between Jekyll and Hyde may be, you are led to believe by the circumstantial evidence that Jekyll is in Hyde's power, or that he is at least persecuted by Hyde. This turns out to be exactly the truth in the moral plot, though in the narrative plot it is true only in a new way that you never suspected. Next door to a right guess, you are

still as far as ever from sensing the real state of affairs, and you are also just in the position that Jekyll himself hoped to be.

Again, the peculiar revulsion of feeling that characterizes every meeting between Hyde and an ordinary man, the "haunting sense of unexpressed deformity," which the reader at first takes to be only a part of the atmosphere, is finally seen to have been part of the moral plot. Lanyon dies mysteriously. Why? Because the evil of this man Hyde is contagious. Lanyon dies of Hyde's Evil. The fact is a haunting detail of the narrative plot, and its peculiar significance is a more fearfully haunting suggestion in the moral plot.

The two strains of the fable are so perfectly interwoven that at last there is a very peculiar and unusual effect. In most stories of terror the solution comes as a distinct relief. It explains away much of the terror. But here the explanation, the final sense of the moral meaning, throws back over many a half-forgotten detail of the narrative plot a light so sharp and terrible that the reader at once begins to contemplate the whole with fresh amazement and increasing awe. It is this which really makes the story a great story and not one where the art of the thing, the trick, becomes obvious and stale as the mind dwells on it.

A definite, though paradoxical proof of the soundness of the art of this story is the stark simplicity of those scenes which most stir the reader. We are

doubtless impressionable beings; but I can still recall the thrills that first stole up my back as Mr. Enfield, on the fourth page of the tale, pointed across the street with his cane, and, as I now read, the same thrills return.

“Did you ever remark that door?” he asked; and when his companion had replied in the affirmative, ‘It is connected in my mind,’ he added, ‘with a very odd story.’

“Indeed?” said Mr. Utterson, with a slight change of voice, ‘and what was that?’ ”

That “slight change of voice” spreads mystery for miles around. At just that point, before the reader knows anything at all, it is a stroke of genius.

The most famous spot is probably the scene at the window, a window in a court of this same house. Mr. Enfield and Mr. Utterson are again on one of their rambles.

“The court was very cool and a little damp, and full of premature twilight, although the sky, high up overhead, was still bright with sunset. The middle one of the three windows was half-way open; and sitting close beside it, taking the air with an infinite sadness of mien, like some disconsolate prisoner, Utterson saw Dr. Jekyll.

“‘What! Jekyll!’ he cried: ‘I trust you are better.’

" 'I am very low, Utterson,' replied the doctor, drearily, 'very low. It will not last long, thank God.'

" 'You stay too much indoors,' said the lawyer. 'You should be out, whipping up the circulation like Mr. Enfield and me. (This is my cousin—Mr. Enfield—Dr. Jekyll.) Come now; get your hat and take a quick turn with us.'

" 'You are very good,' sighed the other. 'I should like to very much; but no, no, no, it is quite impossible; I dare not. But indeed, Utterson, I am very glad to see you; this is really a great pleasure; I would ask you and Mr. Enfield up, but the place is really not fit.'

" 'Why, then,' said the lawyer, good-naturedly, 'the best thing we can do is to stay down here and speak with you from where we are.'

" 'That is just what I was about to venture to propose,' returned the doctor with a smile. But the words were hardly uttered, before the smile was struck out of his face and succeeded by an expression of such abject terror and despair, as froze the very blood of the two gentlemen below. They saw it but for a glimpse, for the window was instantly thrust down; but that glimpse had been sufficient, and they turned and left the court without a word. In silence, too, they traversed the by-streets; and it was not until they had come into a neighbouring thoroughfare, where even upon a Sunday there were still some stirrings of life, that Mr. Utterson at last turned and looked at his companion.

They were both pale; and there was an answering horror in their eyes.

"'God forgive us, God forgive us,' said Mr. Utterson.

"But Mr. Enfield only nodded his head very seriously, and walked on once more in silence."—*Dr. Jekyll*.

Surely, this is not the dime novel method of trumping up excitement. As one comes to this scene in the narrative, full of the most terrible suspicions, one feels an almost unbearable horror, beside which the excitements of cheap literature are merely things to be bought with money over a counter.

### III

The publication of this story in 1886 changed Stevenson's reputation from that of a writer of philosophic sketches and a graceful contributor to magazines to that of the inventor of an idea and a man of artistic force. The book established him internationally. It was soon translated into many European languages. It was dramatized. Sermons were preached about it. The title was on everybody's tongue, and has since passed into the language. And a coincidence, which I think marks the crest of popular literary fame in modern time, was that the pilot who came out from New York to meet Stevenson's ship was known as Hyde by his



crew, while his better tempered companion was known as Jekyll.

Moreover, with so powerful a stimulus as this story, the reading public, anxious to discover more of the author, soon found that Stevenson had long been a romantic moralist in fiction and in the essay. A year before he had written a terrible sermon in the form of a murder tale called "Markheim." Two years before that he had set forth his whimsical philosophy of optimism and bravado in "The Treasure of Franchard," and previously still in "Providence and the Guitar." "Will o' the Mill," "Lodging for the Night," were also moral ideas in the story form. The public discovered, that is, that these tales were exemplifications of the ideas of his essays, and that Stevenson's work, instead of being casual magazine work, had in its great variety, a marking purpose. The author of "Ordered South," "Apology for Idlers," "Aes Triplex," "Lantern Bearers," "Child's Play," was giving out the same message as the author of *Dr. Jekyll*, "Markheim," "The Treasure of Franchard."

Let us attempt to perceive from other fables what the gist of that message is.

"Markheim" is in many ways the most noteworthy and the most original of Stevenson's short stories. Like *Dr. Jekyll* it is a hair-raising piece of philosophy; and it has much the same significance. It is again the simple union of sheer romance and downright morality, a rare trick which it took genius to discover. It is that which gives the tale its

flavor. The situation, the murder that is, is put before us in one of those carefully vivid scenes that hang in the memory almost intact and cast their shadow across succeeding pages. Then while the imagination is thus affected, the real mystery, the real problem of the story, suddenly confronts us. And in this lies the surpassing art of Stevenson as a fabulist. For he can confront us with the terrible moral question of Markheim still shrouded in all the mystery that clings to it in every human life. The question is that of moral evil and the soul. The murderer and his uncorrupted better self come face to face. But does such a better self really exist for Markheim, or is it only a bogle? Stevenson's answer to the question is masterly. He shows Markheim that the worst sin is probably the one we commit in the hope of rescuing our better selves which we have all along been ruining.

These two stories, "Markheim" and *Dr. Jekyll*, are striking symbols of the same sharp truth.

#### IV

Another tale of quite different purport, in which adventure and philosophy are yet blended with similar art, is "A Lodging for the Night." It is significant that it should be Stevenson's first story, and that it should have in addition to the temper of romance the fabulist's touch. Just what this does for the romantic adventure can be thoroughly understood if one comes to the story from "The

Pavilion on the Links," which immediately precedes it in *New Arabian Nights*. "The Pavilion on the Links" has no traces of ethics. It is a mere adventure and rather loosely strung together. "A Lodging for the Night," on the other hand, is a most incisive incident, the mark it leaves being as much on the conscience as on the care-free imagination. Like "Markheim," "Will o' the Mill," or "Providence and the Guitar," it is the expression of several sides of Stevenson's genius; and not, like "The Pavilion" or "The Merry Men," an expression of one side alone. There is in it that weight of thought and that precision of phrase characteristic of his finest essays, and also a heightened atmosphere of romantic excitement. In the ability to perfect these combined qualities lay Stevenson's genius, and this story offers an exceptional chance to study it.

Stevenson had been investigating the life and times of François Villon, "student, poet, and house-breaker," and had two months before shaped his inclinations and impressions into an essay for *The Cornhill*. That essay is distinctly a document in morals. The keenest relish of the humors of Villon's escapades, and of the significance for French literature of his flexible lyric verse, do not prevent Stevenson from passing a judgment of conscience on this man who cast his jail-bird sentiments into so deft a form. As in the essays on Burns and on Pepys, he is intent on showing a man in his true lights. He carefully does Villon no injustice. A

charming indulgence, however, leads finally but into the strong light of direct comprehension. I wish to quote enough of the essay to show not only how vivid is Stevenson's delineation of Villon's character, but also the skill with which the moralist wins our sympathy for his victim. Sympathy alone is the basis of direct comprehension. This is one of Stevenson's axioms as a critic. You will note afterward that he employs a nearly similar skill and a like sympathy in constructing his romantic tale about the scapegrace.

The essay opens as follows:

"Perhaps one of the most curious revolutions in literary history is the sudden bull's-eye light cast by M. Longnon on the obscure existence of François Villon. His book is not remarkable merely as a chapter of biography exhumed after four centuries. To readers of the poet it will recall, with a flavor of satire, that characteristic passage in which he bequeaths his spectacles—with a humorous reservation of the case—to the hospital for blind paupers known as the Fifteen-Score. Thus equipped, let the blind paupers go and separate the good from the bad in the cemetery of the Innocents! For his own part the poet can see no distinction. Much have the dead people made of their advantages. What does it matter now that they have lain in state beds and nourished portly bodies upon cakes and cream! Here they all lie, to be trodden in the mud; the large estate and the small, sounding virtue and

adroit or powerful vice, in very much the same condition; and a bishop not to be distinguished from a lamplighter with even the strongest spectacles."

"Such," says Stevenson, "was Villon's cynical philosophy." He shows how poor Villon, poor, dependent, well enough educated, yet lacking any sense of obligation to his benefactors, was early initiated into the ways of the crooks of the student quarter in Paris. So the poet begins to lead that life of thievery that he celebrates in the ballads.

"And yet it is not as a thief, but as a homicide, that he makes his first appearance before angry justice. One June 5, 1455, when he was about twenty-four, and had been Master of Arts for a matter of three years, we behold him for the first time quite definitely. Angry justice had, as it were, photographed him in the act of his homicide; and M. Longnon, rummaging among old deeds, has turned up the negative and printed it off for our instruction. Villon had been supping—copiously we may believe—and sat on a stone bench in front of the Church of St. Benoît, in company with a priest called Gilles and a woman of the name of Isabeau. It was nine o'clock, a mightily late hour for the period, and evidently a fine summer's night. Master François carried a mantle, like a prudent man, to keep him from the dews (*serain*), and had a sword below it dangling from his girdle. So these three dallied in front of St. Benoît, taking their pleasure (*pour soy esbatre*). Suddenly there ar-

rived upon the scene a priest, Philippe Chermoye or Sermaise, also with a sword and cloak, and accompanied by one Master Jehan le Mardi. Sermaise, according to Villon's account, which is all we have to go upon, came up blustering and denying God; as Villon rose to make room for him upon the bench, thrust him rudely back into his place; and finally drew his sword and cut open his lower lip, by what I should imagine was a very clumsy stroke. Up to this point, Villon professes to have been a model of courtesy, even of feebleness; and the brawl, in his version, reads like the fable of the wolf and the lamb. But now the lamb was roused; he drew his sword, stabbed Sermaise in the groin, knocked him on the head with a big stone and then, leaving him to his fate, went away to have his own lip doctored by a barber of the name of Fouquet. In one version, he says that Gilles, Isabeau, and Le Mardi ran away at the first high words, and that he and Sermaise had it out alone; in another, Le Mardi is represented as returning and wresting Villon's sword from him: the reader may please himself. Sermaise was picked up, lay all that night in the prison of St. Benoît where he was examined by an official of the Châtelet and expressly pardoned Villon, and died on the following Saturday in the Hôtel Dieu.

"This, as I have said, was in June. Not before January of the next year could Villon extract a pardon from the king; but while his hand was in, he got two. One is for 'François des Loges, alias

(*autrement dit*) de Villon'; and the other runs in the name of François de Montcorbier. Nay, it appears there was a further complication; for in the narrative of the first of these documents, it is mentioned that he passed himself off upon Fouquet, the barber-surgeon, as one Michel Mouton. M. Longnon has a theory that this unhappy accident with Sermaise was the cause of Villon's subsequent irregularities; and that up to that moment he had been the pink of good behavior. But the matter has to my eyes a more dubious air. A pardon necessary for Des Loges and another for Montcorbier? and these two the same person? and one or both of them known by the *alias* of Villon, however honestly come by? and lastly, in the heat of the moment, a fourth name thrown out with an assured countenance? A ship is not to be trusted that sails under so many colours. This is not the simple bearing of innocence. No—the young master was already treading crooked paths; already, he would start and blench at a hand upon his shoulder, with the look we know so well in the face of Hogarth's Idle Apprentice; already, in the blue devils, he would see Henry Cousin, the executor of high justice, going in dolorous procession toward Montfaucon, and hear the wind and the birds crying around Paris gibbet."

This is a sample exploit; and here is another which began at a memorable supper at the Mule Tavern, in front of the Church of St. Mathurin.

One of Villon's crew, Tabary, had ordered the supper. Others joined them at the feast.

"This supper party was to be his first introduction to De Cayeux and Petit-Jehan, which was probably a matter of some concern to the poor man's muddy wits; in the sequel, at least, he speaks of both with an undisguised respect, based on professional inferiority in the matter of picklocks. Dom Nicolas, a Picardy monk, was the fifth and last at table. When supper had been despatched and fairly washed down, we may suppose, with white Baigneux or red Beaune, which were favorite wines among the fellowship, Tabary was solemnly sworn over to secrecy on the night's performances; and the party left the Mule and proceeded to an unoccupied house belonging to Robert de Saint-Simon. This, over a low wall, they entered without difficulty. All but Tabary took off their upper garments; a ladder was found and applied to the high wall which separated Saint-Simon's house from the court of the College of Navarre; the four fellows in their shirt-sleeves (as we might say) clambered over in a twinkling: and Master Guy Tabary remained alone beside the overcoats. From the court the burglars made their way into the vestry of the chapel, where they found a large chest, strengthened with iron bands and closed with four locks. One of these locks they picked, and then, by levering up the corner, forced the other three. Inside was a small coffer, of walnut wood, also barred with iron,



but fastened with only three locks, which were all comfortably picked by the way of the keyhole. In the walnut coffer—a joyous sight by our thieves' lantern—were five hundred crowns of gold. There was some talk of opening the aumries, where, if they had only known, a booty eight or nine times greater lay ready to their hand, but one of the party (I have a humorous suspicion it was Dom Nicolas, the Picardy monk) hurried them away. It was ten o'clock when they mounted the ladder; it was about midnight before Tabary beheld them coming back. To him they gave ten crowns, and promised a share of a two-crown dinner on the morrow; whereat we may suppose his mouth watered. In course of time, he got wind of the real amount of their booty and understood how scurvily he had been used; but he seems to have borne no malice. How could he, against such superb operators as Petit-Jehan and De Cayeux; or a person like Villon, who could have made a new improper romance out of his own head, instead of merely copying an old one with mechanical right hand?"

Such affairs are all one knows of Villon's history. His temperament is illustrated by them and by his poems, especially by the *Large Testament*, "that admirable and despicable performance." The date of this work "is the last date in the poet's biography," Stevenson remarks. "How or when he died, whether decently in bed or trussed up to a gallows, remains a riddle for foolhardy commentators."—"François Villon," *Familiar Studies*.

Now I think that any one who may have tried it will tell us that to make a successful short story out of the same materials with which he has constructed a critical essay, to turn suddenly from appreciator into creator, is a very rare gift. Certainly it implies an intimacy with the subject, a rapid and thorough absorption of detail, that most students of literature and biography never even dream of striving for. Yet all that this comes to, if viewed from a slightly different angle, is a really sympathetic comprehension of a man. It would be a thesis which I should like to defend that anybody who could write an essay as thorough as Stevenson's, could also write a story as vivid as "A Lodging for the Night." My ground of argument would be that the story and the essay have their essential points in common: a personal realization of Villon's humor, a perfectly suggested local background, and the taste for the sort of moral frame which best suits the portrait. The essay begins with a whimsical illustration of Villon's philosophy of life and death. The story begins with an illustration of the actual effect of death on Villon's imagination while he struggles to let his whimsical philosophy reassert itself. The essay proceeds to detail a set of his escapades and to draw the moral. The story selects one typical escapade, embellishes it with moralized dialogue to suit, and then, like the essay, thrusts the hero forth into the uncertainty of his vagabond future.

## A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT

"It was late in November, 1456. The snow fell over Paris with rigorous, relentless persistence; sometimes the wind made a sally and scattered it in flying vortices; sometimes there was a lull, and flake after flake descended out of the black night air, silent, circuitous, interminable. To poor people, looking up under moist eyebrows, it seemed a wonder where it all came from. Master Francis Villon had propounded an alternative that afternoon, at a tavern window: was it only Pagan Jupiter plucking geese upon Olympus? or were the holy angels moulting? He was only a poor Master of Arts, he went on; and as the question somewhat touched upon divinity, he durst not venture to conclude. A silly old priest from Montargis, who was among the company, treated the young rascal to a bottle of wine in honour of the jest and grimaces with which it was accompanied, and swore on his own white beard that he had been just such another irreverent dog when he was Villon's age.

"The air was raw and pointed, but not far below freezing; and the flakes were large, damp, and adhesive. The whole city was sheeted up. An army might have marched from end to end and not a foot-fall given the alarm. If there were any belated birds in heaven, they saw the island like a large white patch, and the bridges like slim white spars, on the black ground of the river. High up overhead the snow settled among the tracery of the cathedral

towers. Many a niche was drifted full; many a statue wore a long white bonnet on its grotesque or sainted head. The gargoyles had been transformed into great false noses, drooping towards the point. The crockets were like upright pillows swollen on one side. In the intervals of the wind, there was a dull sound of dripping about the precincts of the church.

"The cemetery of St. John had taken its own share of the snow. All the graves were decently covered; tall white housetops stood around in grave array; worthy burghers were long ago in bed, be-night-capped like their domiciles; there was no light in all the neighbourhood but a little peep from a lamp that hung swinging in the church choir, and tossed the shadows to and fro in time to its oscillations. The clock was hard on ten when the patrol went by with halberds and a lantern, beating their hands; and they saw nothing suspicious about the cemetery of St. John.

"Yet there was a small house, backed up against the cemetery wall, which was still awake, and awake to evil purpose, in that snoring district. There was not much to betray it from without; only a stream of warm vapour from the chimney-top, a patch where the snow melted on the roof, and a few half-obliterated footprints at the door. But within, behind the shuttered windows, Master Francis Villon the poet, and some of the thievish crew with whom he consorted were keeping the night alive and passing round the bottle.

"A great pile of living embers diffused a strong and ruddy glow from the arched chimney. Before this straddled Dom Nicolas, the Picardy monk, with his skirts picked up and his fat legs bared to the comfortable warmth. His dilated shadow cut the room in half; and the firelight only escaped on either side of his broad person, and in a little pool between his outspread feet. His face had the beery, bruised appearance of the continual drinker's; it was covered with a network of congested veins, purple in ordinary circumstances, but now pale violet, for even with his back to the fire the cold pinched him on the other side. His cowl had half fallen back, and made a strange excrescence on either side of his bull neck. So he straddled, grumbling, and cut the room in half with the shadow of his portly frame.

"On the right, Villon and Guy Tabary were huddled together over a scrap of parchment; Villon making a ballade which he was to call the 'Ballade of Roast Fish,' and Tabary spluttering admiration at his shoulder. The poet was a rag of a man, dark, little, and lean, with hollow cheeks and thin black locks. He carried his four-and-twenty years with feverish animation. Greed had made folds about his eyes, evil smiles had puckered his mouth. The wolf and pig struggled together in his face. It was an eloquent, sharp, ugly, earthly countenance. His hands were small and prehensile, with fingers knotted like a cord; and they were continually flickering in front of him in violent and expressive pantomime. As for Tabary, a broad, complacent, ad-

miring imbecility breathed from his squash nose and slobbering lips: he had become a thief, just as he might have become the most decent of burgesses, by the imperious chance that rules the lives of human geese and human donkeys.

"At the monk's other hand, Montigny and Thevenin Pensete played a game of chance. About the first there clung some flavour of good birth and training, as about a fallen angel; something long, lithe, and courtly in the person; something aquiline and darkling in the face. Thevenin, poor soul, was in great feather: he had done a good stroke of knavery that afternoon in the Faubourg St. Jacques, and all night he had been gaining from Montigny. A flat smile illuminated his face; his bald head shone rosily in a garland of red curls; his little protuberant stomach shook with silent chucklings as he swept in his gains.

"'Doubles or quits?' said Thevenin.

"Montigny nodded grimly.

"*'Some may prefer to dine in state,'* wrote Villon, *'On bread and cheese on silver plate.* Or, or—help me out, Guido!"

"Tabary giggled.

"*'Or parsley on a golden dish,'* scribbled the poet.

"The wind was freshening without; it drove the snow before it, and sometimes raised its voice in a victorious whoop, and made sepulchral grumblings in the chimney. The cold was growing sharper as the night went on. Villon, protruding his lips, imitated the gust with something between a whistle

and a groan. It was an eerie, uncomfortable talent of the poet's, much detested by the Picardy monk.

"'Can't you hear it rattle in the gibbet?' said Villon. 'They are all dancing the devil's jig on nothing, up there. You may dance, my gallants, you'll be none the warmer! Whew! what a gust! Down went somebody just now! A medlar the fewer on the three-legged medlar-tree!—I say, Dom Nicolas, it'll be cold to-night on the St. Denis Road?' he asked.

"Dom Nicolas winked both his big eyes, and seemed to choke upon his Adam's apple. Montfaucon, the great grisly Paris gibbet, stood hard by the St. Denis Road, and the pleasantry touched him on the raw. As for Tabary, he laughed immoderately over the medlars; he had never heard anything more light-hearted; and he held his sides and crowed. Villon fetched him a fillip on the nose, which turned his mirth into an attack of coughing.

"'Oh, stop that row,' said Villon, 'and think of rhymes to "fish."'

"'Doubles or quits,' said Montigny doggedly.

"'With all my heart,' quoth Thevenin.

"'Is there any more in that bottle?' asked the monk.

"'Open another,' said Villon. 'How do you ever hope to fill that big hogshead, your body, with little things like bottles? And how do you expect to get to heaven? How many angels, do you fancy, can be spared to carry up a single monk from Picardy?'

Or do you think yourself another Elias—and they'll send the coach for you?"

"*'Hominibus impossibile,'* replied the monk as he filled his glass.

"Tabary was in ecstasies.

"Villon filliped his nose again.

"*'Laugh at my jokes, if you like,'* he said.

"*'It was very good,'* objected Tabary.

"Villon made a face at him. 'Think of rhymes to "fish,"' he said. 'What have you to do with Latin? You'll wish you knew none of it at the great as-sizes, when the devil calls for Guido Tabary, clericus—the devil with the hump-back and red-hot finger-nails. Talking of the devil,' he added in a whisper, 'look at Montigny!'

"All three peered covertly at the gamester. He did not seem to be enjoying his luck. His mouth was a little to a side; one nostril nearly shut, and the other much inflated. The black dog was on his back, as people say, in terrifying nursery metaphor; and he breathed hard under the gruesome burden.

"*'He looks as if he could knife him,'* whispered Tabary, with round eyes.

"The monk shuddered, and turned his face and spread his open hands to the red embers. It was the cold that thus affected Dom Nicolas, and not any excess of moral sensibility.

"*'Come, now,'* said Villon—'about this ballade. How does it run so far?' And beating time with his hand, he read it aloud to Tabary.



"They were interrupted at the fourth rhyme by a brief and fatal movement among the gamesters. The round was completed, and Thevenin was just opening his mouth to claim another victory, when Montigny leaped up, swift as an adder, and stabbed him to the heart. The blow took effect before he had time to utter a cry, before he had time to move. A tremor or two convulsed his frame; his hands opened and shut, his heels rattled on the floor; then his head rolled backward over one shoulder with the eyes wide open, and Thevenin Pensete's spirit had returned to Him who made it.

"Every one sprang to his feet; but the business was over in two twos. The four living fellows looked at each other in rather a ghastly fashion; the dead man contemplating a corner of the roof with a singular and ugly leer.

"'My God!' said Tabary; and he began to pray in Latin.

"Villon broke out into hysterical laughter. He came a step forward and ducked a ridiculous bow at Thevenin, and laughed still louder. Then he sat down suddenly, all of a heap, upon a stool, and continued laughing bitterly as though he would shake himself to pieces.

"Montigny recovered his composure first.

"'Let's see what he has about him,' he remarked, and he picked the dead man's pockets with a practised hand, and divided the money into four equal portions on the table. 'There's for you,' he said.

"The monk received his share with a deep sigh,

and a single stealthy glance at the dead Thevenin, who was beginning to sink into himself and topple sideways off the chair.

"‘We’re all in for it,’ cried Villon, swallowing his mirth. ‘It’s a hanging job for every man jack of us that’s here—not to speak of those who aren’t.’ He made a shocking gesture in the air with his raised right hand, and put out his tongue and threw his head on one side, so as to counterfeit the appearance of one who has been hanged. Then he pocketed his share of the spoil, and executed a shuffle with his feet as if to restore the circulation.

"Tabary was the last to help himself; he made a dash at the money, and retired to the other end of the apartment.

"Montigny stuck Thevenin upright in the chair, and drew out the dagger, which was followed by a jet of blood.

"‘You fellows had better be moving,’ he said, as he wiped the blade on his victim’s doublet.

"‘I think we had,’ returned Villon, with a gulp. ‘Damn his fat head!’ he broke out. ‘It sticks in my throat like phlegm. What right has a man to have red hair when he is dead?’ And he fell all of a heap again upon the stool, and fairly covered his face with his hands.

"Montigny and Dom Nicolas laughed aloud, even Tabary feebly chiming in.

"‘Cry baby,’ said the monk.

"‘I always said he was a woman,’ added Montigny, with a sneer. ‘Sit up, can’t you?’ he went

on, giving another shake to the murdered body. 'Tread out that fire, Nick!'

"But Nick was better employed; he was quietly taking Villon's purse, as the poet sat, limp and trembling, on the stool where he had been making a ballade not three minutes before. Montigny and Tabary dumbly demanded a share of the booty, which the monk silently promised as he passed the little bag into the bosom of his gown. In many ways an artistic nature unfits a man for practical existence.

"No sooner had the theft been accomplished than Villon shook himself, jumped to his feet, and began helping to scatter and extinguish the embers. Meanwhile Montigny opened the door and cautiously peered into the street. The coast was clear; there was no meddlesome patrol in sight. Still it was judged wiser to slip out severally; and as Villon was himself in a hurry to escape from the neighbourhood of the dead Thevenin, and the rest were in a still greater hurry to get rid of him before he should discover the loss of his money, he was the first by general consent to issue forth into the street.

"The wind had triumphed and swept all the clouds from heaven. Only a few vapours, as thin as moonlight, fledted rapidly across the stars. It was bitter cold; and by a common optical effect, things seemed almost more definite than in the broadest daylight. The sleeping city was absolutely still; a company of white hoods, a field full of little alps, below the twinkling stars. Villon cursed his fortune. Would

it were still snowing! Now, wherever he went, he left an indelible trail behind him on the glittering streets; wherever he went he was still tethered to the house by the cemetery of St. John; wherever he went he must weave, with his own plodding feet, the rope that bound him to the crime and would bind him to the gallows. The leer of the dead man came back to him with a new significance. He snapped his fingers as if to pluck up his own spirits, and choosing a street at random, stepped boldly forward in the snow.

"Two things preoccupied him as he went: the aspect of the gallows at Montfaucon in this bright, windy phase of the night's existence, for one; and for another, the look of the dead man with his bald head and garland of red curls. Both struck cold upon his heart, and he kept quickening his pace as if he could escape from unpleasant thoughts by mere fleetness of foot. Sometimes he looked back over his shoulder with a sudden nervous jerk; but he was the only moving thing in the white streets, except when the wind swooped round a corner and threw up the snow, which was beginning to freeze, in spouts of glittering dust.

"Suddenly he saw, a long way before him, a black clump and a couple of lanterns. The clump was in motion, and the lanterns swung as though carried by men walking. It was a patrol. And though it was merely crossing his line of march he judged it wiser to get out of eyeshot as speedily as he could. He was not in the humour to be challenged, and he

was conscious of making a very conspicuous mark upon the snow. Just on his left hand there stood a great hotel, with some turrets and a large porch before the door; it was half-ruinous, he remembered, and had long stood empty; and so he made three steps of it, and jumped into the shelter of the porch. It was pretty dark inside, after the glimmer of the snowy streets, and he was groping forward with outspread hands, when he stumbled over some substance which offered an indescribable mixture of resistances, hard and soft, firm and loose. His heart gave a leap, and he sprang two steps back and stared dreadfully at the obstacle. Then he gave a little laugh of relief. It was only a woman, and she dead. He knelt beside her to make sure upon this latter point. She was freezing cold, and rigid like a stick. A little ragged finery fluttered in the wind about her hair, and her cheeks had been heavily rouged that same afternoon. Her pockets were quite empty; but in her stocking, underneath the garter, Villon found two of the small coins that went by the name of whites. It was little enough; but it was always something; and the poet was moved with a deep sense of pathos that she should have died before she had spent her money. That seemed to him a dark and pitiable mystery; and he looked from the coins in his hand to the dead woman, and back again to the coins, shaking his head over the riddle of man's life. Henry V of England, dying at Vincennes just after he had conquered France, and this poor jade cut off by a cold draught in a great man's

doorway, before she had time to spend her couple of whites—it seemed a cruel way to carry on the world. Two whites would have taken such a little while to squander; and yet it would have been one more good taste in the mouth, one more smack of the lips, before the devil got the soul, and the body was left to birds and vermin. He would like to use all his tallow before the light was blown out and the lantern broken.

“While these thoughts were passing through his mind, he was feeling, half mechanically, for his purse. Suddenly his heart stopped beating; a feeling of cold scales passed up the back of his legs, and a cold blow seemed to fall upon his scalp. He stood petrified for a moment; then he felt again with one feverish movement; and then his loss burst upon him, and he was covered at once with perspiration. To spendthrifts money is so living and actual—it is such a thin veil between them and their pleasures! There is only one limit to their fortune—that of time; and a spendthrift with only a few crowns is the Emperor of Rome until they are spent. For such a person to lose his money is to suffer the most shocking reverse, and fall from heaven to hell, from all to nothing, in a breath. And all the more if he has put his head in the halter for it; if he may be hanged to-morrow for that same purse, so dearly earned, so foolishly departed! Villon stood and cursed; he threw the two whites into the street; he shook his fist at heaven; he stamped, and was not horrified to find himself trampling the poor

corpse. Then he began rapidly to retrace his steps towards the house beside the cemetery. He had forgotten all fear of the patrol, which was long gone by at any rate, and had no idea but that of his lost purse. It was in vain that he looked right and left upon the snow: nothing was to be seen. He had not dropped it in the streets. Had it fallen in the house? He would have liked dearly to go in and see; but the idea of the grisly occupant unmanned him. And he saw besides, as he drew near, that their efforts to put out the fire had been unsuccessful; on the contrary, it had broken into a blaze, and a changeful light played in the chinks of door and window, and revived his terror for the authorities and Paris gibbet.

"He returned to the hotel with the porch, and groped about upon the snow for the money he had thrown away in his childish passion. But he could only find one white; the other had probably struck sideways and sunk deeply in. With a single white in his pocket, all his projects for a rousing night in some wild tavern vanished utterly away. And it was not only pleasure that fled laughing from his grasp; positive discomfort, positive pain, attacked him as he stood ruefully before the porch. His perspiration had dried upon him; and although the wind had now fallen, a binding frost was setting in stronger with every hour, and he felt benumbed and sick at heart. What was to be done? Late as was the hour, improbable as was success, he

would try the house of his adopted father, the chaplain of St. Benoit.

"He ran there all the way, and knocked timidly. There was no answer. He knocked again and again, taking heart with every stroke; and at last steps were heard approaching from within. A barred wicket fell open in the iron-studded door, and emitted a gush of yellow light.

" 'Hold up your face to the wicket,' said the chaplain from within.

" 'It's only me,' whimpered Villon.

" 'Oh, it's only you, is it?' returned the chaplain; and he cursed him with foul unpriestly oaths for disturbing him at such an hour, and bade him be off to hell, where he came from.

" 'My hands are blue to the wrist,' pleaded Villon; 'my feet are dead and full of twinges; my nose aches with the sharp air; the cold lies at my heart. I may be dead before morning. Only this once, father, and before God, I will never ask again!'

" 'You should have come earlier,' said the ecclesiastic coolly. 'Young men require a lesson now and then.' He shut the wicket and retired deliberately into the interior of the house.

"Villon was beside himself; he beat upon the door with his hands and feet, and shouted hoarsely after the chaplain.

" 'Wormy old fox!' he cried. 'If I had my hand under your twist, I would send you flying headlong into the bottomless pit.'



"A door shut in the interior, faintly audible to the poet down long passages. He passed his hand over his mouth with an oath. And then the humour of the situation struck him, and he laughed and looked lightly up to heaven, where the stars seemed to be winking over his discomfiture.

"What was to be done? It looked very like a night in the frosty streets. The idea of the dead woman popped into his imagination, and gave him a hearty fright; what had happened to her in the early night might very well happen to him before morning. And he so young! and with such immense possibilities of disorderly amusement before him! He felt quite pathetic over the notion of his own fate, as if it had been some one else's, and made a little imaginative vignette of the scene in the morning when they should find his body.

"He passed all his chances under review, turning the white between his thumb and forefinger. Unfortunately he was on bad terms with some old friends who would once have taken pity on him in such a plight. He had lampooned them in verses; he had beaten and cheated them; and yet now, when he was in so close a pinch, he thought there was at least one who might perhaps relent. It was a chance. It was worth trying at least, and he would go and see.

"On the way, two little accidents happened to him which coloured his musings in a very different manner. For, first, he fell in with the track of a patrol, and walked in it for some hundred yards,

although it lay out of his direction. And this spirited him up; at least he had confused his trail; for he was still possessed with the idea of people tracking him all about Paris over the snow, and collaring him next morning before he was awake. The other matter affected him quite differently. He passed a street corner, where, not so long before, a woman and her child had been devoured by wolves. This was just the kind of weather, he reflected when wolves might take it into their heads to enter Paris again; and a lone man in these deserted streets would run the chance of something worse than a mere scare. He stopped and looked upon the place with an unpleasant interest—it was a centre where several lanes intersected each other; and he looked down them all, one after another, and held his breath to listen, lest he should detect some galloping black things on the snow or hear the sound of howling between him and the river. He remembered his mother telling him the story and pointing out the spot, while he was yet a child. His mother! If he only knew where she lived, he might make sure at least of shelter. He determined he would inquire upon the morrow; nay, he would go and see her too, poor old girl! So thinking, he arrived at his destination—his last hope for the night.

“The house was quite dark, like its neighbours; and yet after a few taps, he heard a movement overhead, a door opening, and a cautious voice asking who was there. The poet named himself in a loud whisper, and waited, not without some trepidation,

the result. Nor had he to wait long. A window was suddenly opened, and a pailful of slops splashed down upon the doorstep. Villon had not been unprepared for something of the sort, and had put himself as much in shelter as the nature of the porch admitted; but for all that, he was deplorably drenched below the waist. His hose began to freeze almost at once. Death from cold and exposure stared him in the face; he remembered he was of phthisical tendency, and began coughing tentatively. But the gravity of the danger steadied his nerves. He stopped a few hundred yards from the door where he had been so rudely used, and reflected with his finger to his nose. He could only see one way of getting a lodging, and that was to take it. He had noticed a house not far away, which looked as if it might be easily broken into, and thither he betook himself promptly, entertaining himself on the way with the idea of a room still hot, with a table still loaded with the remains of supper, where he might pass the rest of the black hours and whence he should issue, on the morrow, with an armful of valuable plate. He even considered on what viands and what wines he should prefer; and as he was calling the roll of his favourite dainties, roast fish presented itself to his mind with an odd mixture of amusement and horror.

“‘I shall never finish that ballade,’ he thought to himself; and then, with another shudder at the recollection, ‘Oh, damn his fat head!’ he repeated fervently, and spat upon the snow.

"The house in question looked dark at first sight; but as Villon made a preliminary inspection in search of the handiest point of attack, a little twinkle of light caught his eye from behind a curtained window.

" 'The devil!' he thought. 'People awake! Some student or some saint, confound the crew! Can't they get drunk and lie in bed snoring like their neighbours! What's the good of curfew, and poor devils of bell-ringers jumping at a rope's end in bell-towers? What's the use of day, if people sit up all night? The gripes to them!' He grinned as he saw where his logic was leading him. 'Every man to his business, after all,' added he, 'and if they're awake, by the Lord, I may come by a supper honestly for once, and cheat the devil.'

"He went boldly to the door and knocked with an assured hand. On both previous occasions, he had knocked timidly and with some dread of attracting notice; but now when he had just discarded the thought of a burglarious entry, knocking at a door seemed a mighty simple and innocent proceeding. The sound of his blows echoed through the house with thin, phantasmal reverberations, as though it were quite empty; but these had scarcely died away before a measured tread drew near, a couple of bolts were withdrawn, and one wing was opened broadly, as though no guile or fear of guile were known to those within. A tall figure of a man, muscular and spare, but a little bent, confronted Villon. The head was massive in bulk, but finely sculptured; the nose blunt at the bottom, but refining upward to where it

joined a pair of strong and honest eyebrows; the mouth and eyes surrounded with delicate markings, and the whole face based upon a thick white beard, boldly and squarely trimmed. Seen as it was by the light of a flickering hand-lamp, it looked perhaps nobler than it had a right to do; but it was a fine face, honourable rather than intelligent, strong, simple, and righteous.

"‘You knock late, sir,’ said the old man in resonant, courteous tones.

"Villon cringed and brought up many servile words of apology; at a crisis of this sort, the beggar was uppermost in him, and the man of genius hid his head with confusion.

"‘You are cold,’ repeated the old man, ‘and hungry? Well, step in.’ And he ordered him into the house with a noble enough gesture.

"‘Some great seigneur,’ thought Villon, as his host, setting down the lamp on the flagged pavement of the entry, shot the bolts once more into their places.

"‘You will pardon me if I go in front,’ he said, when this was done; and he preceded the poet upstairs into a large apartment, warmed with a pan of charcoal and lit by a great lamp hanging from the roof. It was very bare of furniture: only some gold plate on a sideboard; some folios; and a stand of armour between the windows. Some smart tapestry hung upon the walls, representing the crucifixion of our Lord in one piece, and in another a

scene of shepherds and shepherdesses by a running stream. Over the chimney was a shield of arms.

“‘Will you seat yourself,’ said the old man, ‘and forgive me if I leave you? I am alone in my house to-night, and if you are to eat I must forage for you myself.’

“No sooner was his host gone than Villon leaped from the chair on which he had just seated himself, and began examining the room, with the stealth and passion of a cat. He weighed the gold flagons in his hand, opened all the folios, and investigated the arms upon the shield, and the stuff with which the seats were lined. He raised the window curtains, and saw that the windows were set with rich stained glass in figures, so far as he could see, of martial import. Then he stood in the middle of the room, drew a long breath, and retaining it with puffed cheeks, looked round and round him, turning on his heels, as if to impress every feature of the apartment on his memory.

“‘Seven pieces of plate,’ he said. ‘If there had been ten, I would have risked it. A fine house, and a fine old master, so help me all the saints!’

“And just then, hearing the old man’s tread returning along the corridor, he stole back to his chair, and began humbly toasting his wet legs before the charcoal pan.

“His entertainer had a plate of meat in one hand and a jug of wine in the other. He set down the plate upon the table, motioning Villon to draw in

his chair, and going to the sideboard, brought back two goblets, which he filled.

" 'I drink your better fortune,' he said, gravely touching Villon's cup with his own.

" 'To our better acquaintance,' said the poet, growing bold. A mere man of the people would have been awed by the courtesy of the old seigneur, but Villon was hardened in that matter; he had made mirth for great lords before now, and found them as black rascals as himself. And so he devoted himself to the viands with a ravenous gusto, while the old man, leaning backward, watched him with steady, curious eyes.

" 'You have blood on your shoulder, my man,' he said.

" 'Montigny must have laid his wet right hand upon him as he left the house. He cursed Montigny in his heart.

" 'It was none of my shedding,' he stammered.

" 'I had not supposed so,' returned his host quietly. 'A brawl?'

" 'Well, something of that sort,' Villon admitted with a quaver.

" 'Perhaps a fellow murdered?'

" 'Oh no, not murdered,' said the poet, more and more confused. 'It was all fair play—murdered by accident. I had no hand in it, God strike me dead!' he added fervently.

" 'One rogue the fewer, I dare say,' observed the master of the house.

" 'You may dare to say that,' agreed Villon, in-

finitely relieved. 'As big a rogue as there is between here and Jerusalem. He turned up his toes like a lamb. But it was a nasty thing to look at. I dare say you've seen dead men in your time, my lord?' he added, glancing at the armour.

" 'Many,' said the old man. 'I have followed the wars, as you imagine.'

"Villon laid down his knife and fork, which he had just taken up again.

" 'Were any of them bald?' he asked.

" 'Oh yes, and with hair as white as mine.'

" 'I don't think I should mind the white so much,' said Villon. 'His was red.' And he had a return of his shuddering and tendency to laughter, which he drowned with a great draught of wine. 'I'm a little put out when I think of it,' he went on. 'I knew him—damn him! And then the cold gives a man fancies—or the fancies give a man cold, I don't know which.'

" 'Have you any money?' asked the old man.

" 'I have one white,' returned the poet, laughing. 'I got it out of a dead jade's stocking in a porch. She was as dead as Cæsar, poor wench, and as cold as a church, with bits of ribbon sticking in her hair. This is a hard world in winter for wolves and wenches and poor rogues like me.'

" 'I,' said the old man, 'am Enguerrand de la Feuillée, seigneur de Brisetout, bailly du Patatrac. Who and what may you be?'

"Villon rose and made a suitable reverence. 'I am called Francis Villon,' he said, 'a poor Master



of Arts of this university. I know some Latin, and a deal of vice. I can make chansons, ballades, lais, virelais, and roundels, and I am very fond of wine. I was born in a garret, and I shall not improbably die upon the gallows. I may add, my lord, that from this night forward I am your lordship's very obsequious servant to command.'

" 'No servant of mine,' said the knight; 'my guest for this evening, and no more.'

" 'A very grateful guest,' said Villon, politely, and he drank in dumb show to his entertainer.

" 'You are shrewd,' began the old man, tapping his forehead, 'very shrewd; you have learning; you are a clerk; and yet you take a small piece of money off a dead woman in the street. Is it not a kind of theft?'

" 'It is a kind of theft much practised in the wars, my lord.'

" 'The wars are the field of honour,' returned the old man proudly. 'There a man plays his life upon the cast; he fights in the name of his lord the king, his Lord God, and all their lordships the holy saints and angels.'

" 'Put it,' said Villon, 'that I were really a thief, should I not play my life also, and against heavier odds?'

" 'For gain but not for honour.'

" 'Gain?' repeated Villon with a shrug. 'Gain! The poor fellow wants supper, and takes it. So does the soldier in a campaign. Why, what are all these requisitions we hear so much about? If they

are not gain to those who take them, they are loss enough to the others. The men-at-arms drink by a good fire, while the burgher bites his nails to buy them wine and wood. I have seen a good many ploughmen swinging on trees about the country; ay, I have seen thirty on one elm, and a very poor figure they made; and when I asked some one how all these came to be hanged, I was told it was because they could not scrape together enough crowns to satisfy the men-at-arms.'

"These things are a necessity of war, which the lowborn must endure with constancy. It is true that some captains drive overhard; there are spirits in every rank not easily moved by pity; and indeed many follow arms who are no better than brigands.'

"'You see,' said the poet, 'you cannot separate the soldier from the brigand; and what is a thief but an isolated brigand with circumspect manners? I steal a couple of mutton chops, without so much as disturbing people's sleep; the farmer grumbles a bit, but sups none the less wholesomely on what remains. You come up blowing gloriously on a trumpet, take away the whole sheep, and beat the farmer pitifully into the bargain. I have no trumpet; I am only Tom, Dick, or Harry; I am a rogue and a dog, and hanging's too good for me—with all my heart; but just ask the farmer which of us he prefers, just find out which of us he lies awake to curse on cold nights.'

"'Look at us two,' said his lordship. 'I am old, strong, and honoured. If I were turned from my

house to-morrow, hundreds would be proud to shelter me. Poor people would go out and pass the night in the streets with their children, if I merely hinted that I wished to be alone. And I find you up, wandering homeless, and picking farthings off dead women by the wayside! I fear no man and nothing; I have seen you tremble and lose countenance at a word. I wait God's summons contentedly in my own house, or, if it please the king to call me again, upon the field of battle. You look for the gallows; a rough, swift death, without hope or honour. Is there no difference between these two?"

"'As far as to the moon,' Villon acquiesced. 'But if I had been born lord of Brisetout, and you had been the poor scholar Francis, would the difference have been any the less? Should not I have been warming my knees at this charcoal pan, and would not you have been groping for farthings in the snow? Should not I have been the soldier, and you the thief?"

"'A thief?' cried the old man. 'I a thief! If you understood your words, you would repent them.'

"Villon turned out his hands with a gesture of inimitable impudence. 'If your lordship had done me the honour to follow my argument!' he said.

"'I do you too much honour in submitting to your presence,' said the knight. 'Learn to curb your tongue when you speak with old and honourable men, or some one hastier than I may reprove you in a sharper fashion.' And he rose and paced the

lower end of the apartment, struggling with anger and antipathy. Villon surreptitiously refilled his cup, and settled himself more comfortably in the chair, crossing his knees and leaning his head upon one hand and the elbow against the back of the chair. He was now replete and warm; and he was in nowise frightened for his host, having gauged him as justly as was possible between two such different characters. The night was far spent, and in a very comfortable fashion after all; and he felt morally certain of a safe departure on the morrow.

“‘Tell me one thing,’ said the old man, pausing in his walk. ‘Are you really a thief?’

“‘I claim the sacred rights of hospitality,’ returned the poet. ‘My lord, I am.’

“‘You are very young,’ the knight continued.

“‘I should never have been so old,’ replied Villon, showing his fingers, ‘if I had not helped myself with these ten talents. They have been my nursing mothers and my nursing fathers.’

“‘You may still repent and change.’

“‘I repent daily,’ said the poet. ‘There are few people more given to repentance than poor Francis. As for change, let somebody change my circumstances. A man must continue to eat, if it were only that he may continue to repent.’

“‘The change must begin in the heart,’ returned the old man solemnly.

“‘My dear lord,’ answered Villon, ‘do you really fancy that I steal for pleasure? I hate stealing, like any other piece of work or of danger. My

teeth chatter when I see a gallows. But I must eat, I must drink, I must mix in society of some sort. What the devil! Man is not a solitary animal—*cui Deus fœminam tradit*. Make me king's pantler—make me abbot of St. Denis; make me bailly of the Patatrac; and then I shall be changed indeed. But as long as you leave me the poor scholar Francis Villon, without a farthing, why, of course, I remain the same.'

" 'The grace of God is all-powerful.'

" 'I should be a heretic to question it,' said Francis. 'It has made you lord of Brisetout and bailly of the Patatrac; it has given me nothing but the quick wits under my hat and these ten toes upon my hands. May I help myself to wine? I thank you respectfully. By God's grace, you have a very superior vintage.'

" 'The lord of Brisetout walked to and fro with his hands behind his back. Perhaps he was not yet quite settled in his mind about the parallel between thieves and soldiers; perhaps Villon had interested him by some cross-thread of sympathy; perhaps his wits were simply muddled by so much unfamiliar reasoning; but whatever the cause, he somehow yearned to convert the young man to a better way of thinking, and could not make up his mind to drive him forth again into the street.

" 'There is something more than I can understand in this,' he said at length. 'Your mouth is full of subtleties, and the devil has led you very far astray; but the devil is only a very weak spirit be-

fore God's truth, and all his subtleties vanish at a word of true honour, like darkness at morning. Listen to me once more. I learned long ago that a gentleman should live chivalrously and lovingly to God, and the king, and his lady; and though I have seen many strange things done, I have still striven to command my ways upon that rule. It is not only written in all noble histories, but in every man's heart, if he will take care to read. You speak of food and wine, and I know very well that hunger is a difficult trial to endure; but you do not speak of other wants; you say nothing of honour, of faith to God and other men, of courtesy, of love without reproach. It may be that I am not very wise—and yet I think I am—but you seem to me like one who has lost his way and made a great error in life. You are attending to the little wants, and you have totally forgotten the great and only real ones, like a man who should be doctoring toothache on the Judgment Day. For such things as honour and love and faith are not only nobler than food and drink, but indeed I think we desire them more, and suffer more sharply for their absence. I speak to you as I think you will most easily understand me. Are you not, while careful to fill your belly, disregarding another appetite in your heart, which spoils the pleasure of your life and keeps you continually wretched?

“Villon was sensibly nettled under all this sermonising. ‘You think I have no sense of honour!’ he cried. ‘I’m poor enough, God knows! It’s hard

to see rich people with their gloves, and you blowing in your hands. An empty belly is a bitter thing, although you speak so lightly of it. If you had had as many as I, perhaps you would change your tune. Anyway I'm a thief—make the most of that—but I'm not a devil from hell, God strike me dead. I would have you to know I've an honour of my own, as good as yours, though I don't prate about it all day long, as if it was a God's miracle to have any. It seems quite natural to me; I keep it in its box till it's wanted. Why now, look you here, how long have I been in this room with you? Did you not tell me you were alone in the house! Look at your gold plate! You're strong, if you like, but you're old and unarmed, and I have my knife. What did I want but a jerk of the elbow and here would have been you with the cold steel in your bowels, and there would have been me, linking in the streets, with an armful of golden cups! Did you suppose I hadn't wit enough to see that? And I scorned the action. There are your damned goblets, as safe as in a church; there are you, with your heart ticking as good as new; and here am I, ready to go out again as poor as I came in, with my one white that you threw in my teeth! And you think I have no sense of honour—God strike me dead!

"The old man stretched out his right arm. 'I will tell you what you are,' he said. 'You are a rogue, my man, an impudent and black-hearted rogue and vagabond. I have passed an hour with you. Oh! believe me, I feel myself disgraced! And you have

eaten and drunk at my table. But now I am sick at your presence; the day has come, and the night-bird should be off to his roost. Will you go before, or after?’

“‘Which you please,’ returned the poet, rising. ‘I believe you to be strictly honourable.’ He thoughtfully emptied his cup. ‘I wish I could add you were intelligent,’ he went on, knocking on his head with his knuckles. ‘Age! age! the brains stiff and rheumatic.’

“‘The old man preceded him from a point of self-respect; Villon followed, whistling, with his thumbs in his girdle.

“‘God pity you,’ said the lord of Brisetout at the door.

“‘Good-bye, papa,’ returned Villon with a yawn. ‘Many thanks for the cold mutton.’

“‘The door closed behind him. The dawn was breaking over the white roofs. A chill, uncomfortable morning ushered in the day. Villon stood and heartily stretched himself in the middle of the road.

“‘A very dull old gentleman,’ he thought. ‘I wonder what his goblets may be worth.’”

## V

The consummate assurance of Master François’s entrance into the house of Enguerrand de la Feuillée, seigneur de Brisetout, bailly du Patatrac, and the sardonic swagger of his exit represent traits which, in different characters, Stevenson never tired of



delineating. Bravado is perhaps the most frequent property of his people. In his bad men, like the Master, it is made into a fascinating vice of pride. In his likeable characters it becomes a charming vanity. Its extremes are perhaps in the Master and in Alan Breck. But between these two are a number of people who have it in milder, more intellectual or whimsical form, people who are a sort of humorous exaggeration of the sentiments of certain of his essays. Of this type Leon Berthelini in "Providence and the Guitar," and Desprez in "The Treasure of Franchard," are the two most eminent examples.

Monsieur Leon Berthelini, strolling player and man of temper, fallen among the disenchantments of life, or, more exactly, finding himself stranded in the *hostile* town of Castel-le-Gâchis, where the commissary of police is a boor and the café audiences unfeeling, not to mention the odious character of the landlord of the Black Head Hotel, Monsieur Leon and Elvira, his wife, in these untoward circumstances, attempt to play the part of peripatetic philosophers. At least Leon does—he has some difficulty at first in converting his wife to hedonistic stoicism. The night is damp and she fears for her voice. Leon is more successful with a young pedestrian named Stubbs, a Cambridge undergraduate, whom they find asleep in the fields to the west of the town. Stubbs is a good, honest sort, and even if he is just now short of cash, he is going to be a banker. But for the present evening he is made

to talk about art and the stars, and to put his respectable profession in the balance with Leon's. And here lies the point of the story, which, like several other of Stevenson's moralities, has begun with completely humorous unconcern, and will, in fact, not once need to change the tone to the moral end. Let us look at the end.

Madame's artistic fear for her voice having become excessive, the trio are now seeking in earnest for some kind of shelter.

"Leon strode ahead as if he knew exactly where he was going; the sobs of Madame were still faintly audible, and no one uttered a word. A dog barked furiously in a court-yard as they went by; then the church clock struck two, and many domestic clocks followed or preceded it in piping tones. And just then Berthelini spied a light. It burned in a small house on the outskirts of the town, and thither the party now directed their steps.

" 'It is always a chance,' said Leon.

"The house in question stood back from the street behind an open space, part garden, part turnip field; and several outhouses stood forward from either wing at right angles to the front. One of these had recently undergone some change. An enormous window, looking towards the north, had been effected in the wall and roof, and Leon began to hope it was a studio.

" 'If it's only a painter,' he said, with a chuckle, 'ten to one we get as good a welcome as we want.'

" 'I thought painters were principally poor,' said Stubbs.

" 'Ah,' cried Leon, 'you do not know the world as I do. The poorer the better for us.'

"And the trio advanced into the turnip field.

"The light was in the ground floor; as one window was brightly illuminated and two others more faintly, it might be supposed that there was a single lamp in one corner of a large apartment; and a certain tremulousness and temporary dwindling showed that a live fire contributed to the effect. The sound of a voice now became audible; and the trespassers paused to listen. It was pitched in a high, angry key, but had still a good, full, and masculine note in it. The utterance was voluble, too voluble even to be quite distinct; a stream of words, rising and falling, with ever and again a phrase thrown out by itself, as if the speaker reckoned on its virtue.

"Suddenly another voice joined in. This time it was a woman's; and if the man were angry, the woman was incensed to the degree of fury. There was that absolutely blank composure known to suffering males; that colourless unnatural speech which shows a spirit accurately balanced between homicide and hysterics; the tone in which the best of women sometimes utter words worse than death to those most dear to them. If Abstract Bones-and-Sepulchre were to be endowed with the gift of speech, thus, and not otherwise, would it discourse. Leon was a brave man, and I fear he was somewhat sceptically given (he had been educated in a Papistical coun-

try), but the habit of childhood prevailed, and he crossed himself devoutly. He had met several women in his career. It was obvious that his instinct had not deceived him, for the male voice broke forth instantly in a towering passion.

"The undergraduate, who had not understood the significance of the woman's contribution, pricked up his ears at the change upon the man.

" 'There's going to be a free fight,' he opined.

"There was another retort from the woman, still calm but a little higher.

" 'Hysterics?' asked Leon of his wife. 'Is that the stage direction?'

" 'How should I know?' returned Elvira, somewhat tartly.

" 'Oh, woman, woman!' said Leon, beginning to open the guitar-case. 'It is one of the burdens of my life, Monsieur Stubbs; they support each other; they always pretend there is no system; they say it's nature. Even Madame Berthelini who is a dramatic artist!'

" 'You are heartless, Leon,' said Elvira; 'that woman is in trouble.'

" 'And the man, my angel?' inquired Berthelini, passing the ribbon of his guitar. 'And the man, *m'amour?*'

" 'He is a man,' she answered.

" 'You hear that?' said Leon to Stubbs. 'It is not too late for you. Mark the intonation. And now,' he continued, 'what are we to give them?'

" 'Are you going to sing?' asked Stubbs.

" 'I am a troubadour,' replied Leon. 'I claim a welcome by and for my art. If I were a banker could I do as much?'

" 'Well, you wouldn't need, you know,' answered the undergraduate.

" 'Egad,' said Leon, 'but that's true. Elvira, that is true.'

" 'Of course it is,' she replied. 'Did you not know it?'

" 'My dear,' answered Leon, impressively, 'I know nothing but what is agreeable. Even my knowledge of life is a work of art superiorly composed. But what are we to give them? It should be something appropriate.'

" 'Visions of 'Let dogs delight' passed through the undergraduate's mind; but it occurred to him that the poetry was English and that he did not know the air. Hence he contributed no suggestion.

" 'Something about our houselessness,' said Elvira.

" 'I have it,' cried Leon. And he broke forth into a song of Pierre Dupont's:—

*"Savez-vous où gite  
Mai, ce joli mois?"*

"Elvira joined in; so did Stubbs, with a good ear and voice, but an imperfect acquaintance with the music. Leon and the guitar were equal to the situation. The actor dispensed his throat-notes with prodigality and enthusiasm; and, as he looked up to heaven in his heroic way, tossing the black ring-

lets, it seemed to him that the very stars contributed a dumb applause to his efforts, and the universe lent him its silence for a chorus. That is one of the best features of the heavenly bodies, that they belong to everybody in particular; and a man like Leon, a chronic Endymion who managed to get along without encouragement, is always the world's centre for himself.

"He alone—and it is to be noted, he was the worst singer of the three—took the music seriously to heart, and judged the serenade from a high artistic point of view. Elvira, on the other hand, was preoccupied about their reception; and, as for Stubbs, he considered the whole affair in the light of a broad joke.

" 'Know you the lair of May, the lovely month?' went the three voices in the turnip field.

"The inhabitants were plainly fluttered; the light moved to and fro, strengthening in one window, paling in another; and then the door was thrown open, and a man in a blouse appeared on the threshold carrying a lamp. He was a powerful young fellow, with bewildered hair and beard, wearing his neck open; his blouse was stained with oil-colours in a harlequinlike disorder; and there was something rural in the droop and bagginess of his belted trousers.

"From immediately behind him, and indeed over his shoulder, a woman's face looked out into the darkness; it was pale and a little weary, although still young; it wore a dwindling, disappearing pretti-

ness, soon to be quite gone, and the expression was both gentle and sour, and reminded one faintly of the taste of certain drugs. For all that, it was not a face to dislike; when the prettiness had vanished, it seemed as if a certain pale beauty might step in to take its place; and as both the mildness and the asperity were characters of youth, it might be hoped that, with years, both would merge into a constant, brave, and not unkindly temper.

“‘What is all this?’ cried the man.

“Leon had his hat in his hand at once. He came forward with his customary grace; it was a moment which would have earned him a round of cheering on the stage. Elvira and Stubbs advanced behind him, like a couple of Admetus’ sheep following the god Apollo.

“‘Sir,’ said Leon, ‘the hour is unpardonably late, and our little serenade has the air of an impertinence. Believe me, sir, it is an appeal. Monsieur is an artist, I perceive. We are here three artists benighted and without shelter, one a woman—a delicate woman—in evening dress—in an interesting situation. This will not fail to touch the woman’s heart of Madame, whom I perceive indistinctly behind Monsieur her husband, and whose face speaks eloquently of a well-regulated mind. Ah! Monsieur, Madame—one generous movement, and you make three people happy! Two or three hours beside your fire—I ask it of Monsieur in the name of Art—I ask it of Madame by the sanctity of womanhood.’

"The two, as by a tacit consent, drew back from the door.

" 'Come in,' said the man.

" 'Entrez, Madame,' said the woman.

"The door opened directly upon the kitchen of the house, which was to all appearance the only sitting-room. The furniture was both plain and scanty; but there were one or two landscapes on the wall handsomely framed, as if they had already visited the committee-rooms of an exhibition and been thence extruded. Leon walked up to the pictures and represented the part of a connoisseur before each in turn, with his usual dramatic insight and force. The master of the house, as if irresistibly attracted, followed him from canvas to canvas with the lamp. Elvira was led directly to the fire, where she proceeded to warm herself, while Stubbs stood in the middle of the floor and followed the proceedings of Leon with mild astonishment in his eyes.

" 'You should see them by daylight,' said the artist.

" 'I promise myself that pleasure,' said Leon. 'You possess, sir, if you will permit me an observation, the art of composition to a T.'

" 'You are very good,' returned the other. 'But should you not draw nearer to the fire?'

" 'With all my heart,' said Leon.

"And the whole party soon gathered at the table over a hasty and not an elegant cold supper, washed down with the least of small wines. Nobody liked the meal, but nobody complained; they put a good



face upon it, one and all, and made a great clattering of knives and forks. To see Leon eating a single cold sausage was to see a triumph; by the time he had done he had got through as much pantomime as would have sufficed for a baron of beef, and he had the relaxed expression of the over-eaten.

"As Elvira had naturally taken a place by the side of Leon, and Stubbs as naturally, although I believe unconsciously, by the side of Elvira, the host and hostess were left together. Yet it was to be noted that they never addressed a word to each other, nor so much as suffered their eyes to meet. The interrupted skirmish still survived in ill feeling; and the instant the guests departed it would break forth again as bitterly as ever. The talk wandered from this to that subject—for with one accord the party had declared it was too late to go to bed; but those two never relaxed towards each other; Goneril and Regan in a sisterly tiff were not more bent on enmity.

"It chanced that Elvira was so much tired by all the little excitements of the night, that for once she laid aside her company manners, which were both easy and correct, and in the most natural manner in the world leaned her head on Leon's shoulder. At the same time, fatigue suggesting tenderness, she locked the fingers of her right hand into those of her husband's left; and, half-closing her eyes, dozed off into a golden borderland between sleep and waking. But all the time she was not unaware of what was passing, and saw the painter's wife

studying her with looks between contempt and envy.

"It occurred to Leon that his constitution demanded the use of some tobacco; and he undid his fingers from Elvira's in order to roll a cigarette. It was gently done, and he took care that his indulgence should in no other way disturb his wife's position. But it seemed to catch the eye of the painter's wife with a special significance. She looked straight before her for an instant, and then, with a swift and stealthy movement, took hold of her husband's hand below the table. Alas! she might have spared herself the dexterity. For the poor fellow was so overcome by this caress that he stopped with his mouth open in the middle of a word, and by the expression of his face plainly declared to all the company that his thoughts had been diverted into softer channels.

"If it had not been rather amiable, it would have been absurdly droll: His wife at once withdrew her touch; but it was plain she had to exert some force. Thereupon the young man coloured and looked for a moment beautiful.

"Leon and Elvira both observed the by-play, and a shock passed from one to the other; for they were inveterate match-makers, especially between those who were already married.

"'I beg your pardon,' said Leon, suddenly. 'I see no use in pretending. Before we came in here we heard sounds indicating—if I may so express myself—an imperfect harmony.'

" 'Sir—,' began the man.

"But the woman was beforehand.

" 'It is quite true,' she said. 'I see no cause to be ashamed. If my husband is mad I shall at least do my utmost to prevent the consequences. Picture to yourself, Monsieur and Madame,' she went on, for she passed Stubbs over, 'that this wretched person—a dauber, an incompetent, not fit to be a sign-painter—receives this morning an admirable offer from an uncle—an uncle of my own, my mother's brother, and tenderly beloved—of a clerkship with nearly a hundred and fifty pounds a year, and that he—picture to yourself!—he refuses it! Why? For the sake of Art, he says. Look at his art, I say—look at it! Is it fit to be seen? Ask him—is it fit to be sold? And it is for this, Monsieur and Madame, that he condemns me to the most deplorable existence, without luxuries, without comforts, in a vile suburb of a country town. O non!' she cried, 'non—je ne me tairai pas—c'est plus fort que moi! I take these gentlemen and this lady for judges—is this kind? is it decent? is it manly? Do I not deserve better at his hands after having married him and'—(a visible hitch)—'done everything in the world to please him?'

"I doubt if there were ever a more embarrassed company at a table; every one looked like a fool; and the husband like the biggest.

" 'The art of Monsieur, however,' said Elvira, breaking the silence, 'is not wanting in distinction.'

“‘It has this distinction,’ said the wife, ‘that nobody will buy it.’

“‘I should have supposed a clerkship—’ began Stubbs.

“‘Art is Art,’ swept in León. ‘I salute Art. It is the beautiful, the divine; it is the spirit of the world, and the pride of life. But—’ And the actor paused.

“‘A clerkship—’ began Stubbs.

“‘I’ll tell you what it is,’ said the painter. ‘I am an artist, and as this gentleman says, Art is this and the other; but of course, if my wife is going to make my life a piece of perdition all day long, I prefer to go and drown myself out of hand.’

“‘Go!’ said his wife. ‘I should like to see you!’

“‘I was going to say,’ resumed Stubbs, ‘that a fellow may be a clerk and paint almost as much as he likes. I know a fellow in a bank who makes capital water-colour sketches; he even sold one for seven-and-six.’

“To both the women this seemed a plank of safety; each hopefully interrogated the countenance of her lord; even Elvira, an artist herself!—but indeed there must be something permanently mercantile in the female nature. The two men exchanged a glance; it was tragic; not otherwise might two philosophers salute, as at the end of a laborious life each recognised that he was still a mystery to his disciples.

“Leon arose.

"'Art is Art,' he repeated sadly. 'It is not water-colour sketches, nor practising on a piano. It is a life to be lived.'

"'And in the meantime people starve!' observed the woman of the house. 'If that's a life, it is not one for me.'

"'I'll tell you what,' burst forth Leon; 'you, Madame, go into another room and talk it over with my wife; and I'll stay here and talk it over with your husband. It may come to nothing, but let's try.'

"'I am very willing,' replied the young woman; and she proceeded to light a candle. 'This way if you please.' And she led Elvira upstairs into a bedroom. 'The fact is,' said she, sitting down, 'that my husband cannot paint.'

"'No more can mine act,' replied Elvira.

"'I should have thought he could,' returned the other; 'he seems clever.'

"'He is so, and the best of men besides,' said Elvira; 'but he cannot act.'

"'At least he is not a sheer humbug like mine; he can at least sing.'

"'You mistake Leon,' returned his wife, warmly. 'He does not even pretend to sing; he has too fine a taste; he does so for a living. And believe me, neither of the men are humbugs. They are people with a mission—which they cannot carry out.'

"'Humbug or not,' replied the other, 'you came very near passing the night in the fields; and, for my part, I live in terror of starvation. I should

think it was a man's mission to think twice about his wife. But it appears not. Nothing is their mission but to play the fool. Oh!' she broke out, 'is it not something dreary to think of that man of mine? If he could only do it, who would care? But no—not he—no more than I can!'

"'Have you any children?' asked Elvira.

"'No; but then I may.'

"'Children change so much,' said Elvira, with a sigh.

"And just then from the room below there flew up a sudden snapping cord on the guitar; one followed after another; then the voice of Leon joined in; and there was an air being played and sung that stopped the speech of the two women. The wife of the painter stood like a person transfixed; Elvira, looking into her eyes, could see all manner of beautiful memories and kind thoughts that were passing in and out of her soul with every note; it was a piece of her youth that went before her; a green French plain, the smell of apple-flowers, the far and shining ringlets of a river, and the words and presence of love.

"'Leon has hit the nail,' thought Elvira to herself, 'I wonder how.'

"The how was plain enough. Leon had asked the painter if there were no air connected with courtship and pleasant times; and having learned what he wished, and allowed an interval to pass, he had soared forth into

*"O mon amant,  
O mon desir,  
Sachons cueillir  
L'heure charmante!"*

"'Pardon me, Madame,' said the painter's wife, 'your husband sings admirably well.'

"'He sings that with some feeling,' replied Elvira, critically, although she was a little moved herself, for the song cut both ways in the upper chamber; 'but it is as an actor and not as a musician.'

"'Life is very sad,' said the other; 'it so wastes away under one's fingers.'

"'I have not found it so,' replied Elvira. 'I think the good parts of it last and grow greater every day.'

"'Frankly, how would you advise me?'

"'Frankly I would let my husband do what he wished. He is obviously a very loving painter; you have not yet tried him as a clerk. And you know—if it were only as the possible father of your children—it is as well to keep him at his best.'

"'He is an excellent fellow,' said the wife.

"They kept it up till sunrise with music and all manner of good-fellowship; and at sunrise, while the sky was still temperate and clear, they separated on the threshold with a thousand excellent wishes for each other's welfare. Castel-le-Gachis was beginning to send up its smoke against the golden East; and the church bell was ringing six.

"'My guitar is a familiar spirit,' said Leon, as he

and Elvira took the nearest way toward the inn; 'it resuscitated a Commissary, created an English tourist, and reconciled a man and wife.'

"Stubbs, on his part, went off into the morning with reflections of his own.

" 'They are all mad,' thought he, 'all mad—but wonderfully decent.' "—"Providence and the Guitar," *New Arabian Nights*.

This story, which so directly reflects the arguments of "An Apology for Idlers," as well as Stevenson's own experiences in regard to the family profession, might well be called an "Idyll for Optimists." "Even my knowledge of life is a work of art superiorly composed," says Leon. And somewhere else Stevenson remarks characteristically, "I would do nothing that I cannot do smiling." This selective or creative optimism is the very opposite of going blind to the facts. It implies an intense realization of the other possible judgments in the case and a careful choice—some would say a perverse choice. At all events, Stevenson's optimism never lacks humor. It pokes fun at itself and keeps perfectly sane in the midst of its own extravagance. For Stevenson is a critic of optimism as well as an optimist.

## VI

There is another yarn, written in 1883, five years later, where this critical philosophy (gleanings from Epictetus, if you like) is put into narrative form,



an extravaganza called "The Treasure of Franchard." Desprez, the sublimely ridiculous phantasiast, is one more of Stevenson's insuppressibles. He is a theorist, especially of optimisms, but he has at his elbow an admirable imp who pricks his inflations as often as they swell. Desprez and Jean-Marie are sublime theory and natural sense, and it is hard to say which is the more captivating reasoner. Jean-Marie, a waif whom Desprez has adopted, grows up at the doctor's elbow and learns from theory. One of the first things he learns is that it is wrong to steal—though he himself has been forced to steal in order to keep alive. Here is a bit of their ethical dialogue on a morning when the doctor has risen early only to find Jean-Marie up before him.

"'And why do you rise early in the morning?' he pursued.

"Jean-Marie, after a long silence, professed that he hardly knew.

"'You hardly know?' repeated Desprez. 'We hardly know anything, my man, until we try to learn. Interrogate your consciousness. Come, push me this inquiry home. Do you like it?'

"'Yes,' said the boy slowly; 'yes, I like it.'

"'And why do you like it?' continued the Doctor.

"'('We are now pursuing the Socratic method.) Why do you like it?'

"'It is quiet,' answered Jean-Marie; 'and I have nothing to do; and then I feel as if I were good.'

"Doctor Desprez took a seat on the post at the opposite side. He was beginning to take an interest in the talk, for the boy plainly thought before he spoke, and tried to answer truly. 'It appears you have a taste for feeling good,' said the Doctor. 'Now, there you puzzle me extremely; for I thought you said you were a thief; and the two are incompatible.'

" 'Is it very bad to steal?' asked Jean-Marie.

" 'Such is the general opinion, little boy,' replied the Doctor.

" 'No; but I mean as I stole,' exclaimed the other. 'For I had no choice. I think it is surely right to have bread; it must be right to have bread, there comes so plain a want of it. And then they beat me cruelly if I returned with nothing,' he added. 'I was not ignorant of right and wrong; for before that I had been well taught by a priest, who was very kind to me.' (The Doctor made a horrible grimace at the word 'priest.') 'But it seemed to me, when one had nothing to eat and was beaten, it was a different affair. I would not have stolen for tartlets, I believe; but any one would steal for baker's bread.'

" 'And so I suppose,' said the Doctor, with a rising sneer, 'you prayed God to forgive you, and explained the case to Him at length.'

" 'Why, sir?' asked Jean-Marie. 'I do not see.'

" 'Your priest would see, however,' retorted Desprez.

" 'Would he?' asked the boy, troubled for the first

time. 'I should have thought God would have known.'

" 'Eh?' snarled the Doctor.

" 'I should have thought God would have understood me,' replied the other. 'You do not, I see; but then it was God that made me think so, was it not?' "

Especially does Jean-Marie learn from this ratiocinator of Grez (Stevenson has most charmingly framed the legend among his early haunts) all about the blessings of simple forest life as compared with the luxuries of Paris. Desprez does not dare to live in Paris because of his bibulous and spendthrift propensities. Forced to live in Grez, it is the law of golden mediocrity as laid down by the ancients, to whom it was given to do nothing too much, that forms the basis of his creed. But he never wishes to be taken literally or denied the chance of exceptions. Jean-Marie, however, transforms his ratiocinations so rapidly into natural sense and sticks to that so tenaciously, that the doctor is not wholly pleased with the result. The trouble is that Jean-Marie's logic, which has an unanswerable *naïveté*, does not leave room for that play of fancy which, in the doctor's enjoyable optimisms, is a most essential element.

So, when it happens that Doctor Desprez, searching for herbs to study for his "Comparative Pharmacopœia," discovers the legendary treasure of Franchard—plates of gold and a huge coffer—and when

his imagination, instantly transcending all his doctrines of golden mediocrity, soars Paris-ward bearing Anastasie his wife and Jean-Marie to the heights of social grandeur, the imp suffers a great disillusionment. He does the one practical and useful thing. He again pricks the inflation—that is, he steals the treasure. This is not the end of the story, of course; but it is a climax after which nothing matters. And I am not sure but that it is a climax of comic proportion such as you will hardly find outside of Molière.

Here is the doctor in the morning, the sublime sophister whirling himself superiorly in the air on his pinions of fancy as he and Jean-Marie, actually in their two-wheeled noddy, pitch and jerk along the road toward Franchard. Desprez is giving him a history of the place.

“ ‘Singular being!’ said Desprez. ‘But I divagate (I perceive in a thousand ways that I grow old). Franchard was at length destroyed in the English wars, the same that levelled Grez. But—here is the point—the hermits (for there were already more than one) had foreseen the danger and carefully concealed the sacrificial vessels. These vessels were of monstrous value, Jean-Marie—monstrous value—priceless, we may say; exquisitely worked, of exquisite material. And now, mark me, they have never been found. In the reign of Louis Quatorze some fellows were digging hard by the ruins. Suddenly—tock!—the spade hit upon an obstacle.

Imagine the men looking one to another; imagine how their hearts bounded, how their colour came and went. It was a coffer, and in Franchard the place of buried treasure. They tore it open like famished beasts. Alas! it was not the treasure; only some priestly robes, which, at the touch of the eating air, fell upon themselves and instantly wasted into dust. The perspiration of these good fellows turned cold upon them, Jean-Marie. I will pledge my reputation, if there was anything like a cutting wind, one or other had a pneumonia for his trouble.'

" 'I should like to have seen them turning into dust,' said Jean-Marie. 'Otherwise, I should not have cared so greatly.'

" 'You have no imagination,' cried the Doctor. 'Picture to yourself the scene. Dwell on the idea—a great treasure lying in the earth for centuries: the material for a giddy, copious, opulent existence not employed; dresses and exquisite pictures unseen; the swiftest galloping horses not stirring a hoof, arrested by a spell; women with the beautiful faculty of smiles, not smiling; cards, dice, opera singing, orchestras, castles, beautiful parks and gardens, big ships with a tower of sailcloth, all lying unborn in a coffin—and the stupid trees growing overhead in the sunlight, year after year. The thought drives one frantic.'

" 'It is only money,' replied Jean-Marie. 'It would do harm.'

" 'O come!' cried Desprez, 'that is philosophy; it is all very fine, but not to the point just now. And

besides, it is not "only money," as you call it; there are works of art in the question; the vessels were carved. You speak like a child. You weary me exceedingly, quoting my words out of all logical connection, like a parroquet.'

" 'And at any rate we have nothing to do with it,' returned the boy submissively.

"They struck the Route Ronde at that moment; and the sudden change of the rattling causeway combined, with the Doctor's irritation, to keep him silent. The noddy jiggled along; the trees went by, looking on silently, as if they had something on their minds. The Quadrilateral was passed; then came Franchard. They put up the horse at the little solitary inn, and went forth strolling. The gorge was dyed deeply with heather; the rocks and birches standing luminous in the sun. A great humming of bees about the flowers disposed Jean-Marie to sleep, and he sat down against a clump of heather, while the Doctor went briskly to and fro, with quick turns, culling his simples.

"The boy's head had fallen a little forward, his eyes were closed, his fingers had fallen lax about his knees, when a sudden cry called him to his feet. It was a strange sound, thin and brief; it fell dead, and silence returned as though it had never been interrupted. He had not recognised the Doctor's voice; but, as there was no one else in all the valley, it was plainly the Doctor who had given utterance to the sound. He looked right and left, and there was Desprez, standing in a niche between two boul-

ders, and looking round on his adopted son with a countenance as white as paper.

"‘A viper!’ cried Jean-Marie, running towards him. ‘A viper! You are bitten!’

"The Doctor came down heavily out of the cleft, and advanced in silence to meet the boy, whom he took roughly by the shoulder.

"‘I have found it,’ he said with a gasp.

"‘A plant?’ asked Jean-Marie.

"Desprez had a fit of unnatural gaiety, which the rocks took up and mimicked. ‘A plant!’ he repeated scornfully. ‘Well—yes—a plant. And here,’ he added suddenly, showing his right hand, which he had hitherto concealed behind his back—‘here is one of the bulbs.’

"Jean-Marie saw a dirty platter, coated with earth.

"‘That?’ said he. ‘It is a plate!’

"‘It is a coach and horses,’ cried the Doctor. ‘Boy,’ he continued, growing warmer, ‘I plucked away a great pad of moss from between these boulders, and disclosed a crevice; and when I looked in, what do you suppose I saw? I saw a house in Paris with a court and garden, I saw my wife shining with diamonds, I saw myself a deputy, I saw you—well, I—saw your future,’ he concluded, rather feebly. ‘I have just discovered America,’ he added.

"‘But what is it?’ asked the boy.

"‘The Treasure of Franchard,’ cried the Doctor; and, throwing his brown straw hat upon the ground, he whooped like an Indian and sprang upon Jean-Marie, whom he suffocated with embraces and be-

dewed with tears. Then he flung himself down among the heather and once more laughed until the valley rang." . .

Desprez decides to telegraph for his brother-in-law Casimir—the unromantic, level-headed business man. So they return with the treasure through the forest by way of Fontainebleau, Desprez improving his new philosophy with every mile, and raised, if that were possible, slightly above the acme of his own temperament by a bottle of English ale drunk at an inn.

“ ‘Beautiful forest,’ he cried, ‘farewell! Though called to other scenes, I will not forget thee. Thy name is graven in my heart. Under the influence of prosperity I become dithyrambic, Jean-Marie. Such is the impulse of the natural soul; such was the constitution of primæval man. And I—well, I will not refuse the credit—I have preserved my youth like a virginity; another, who should have led the same snoozing, countrified existence for these years, another had become rusted, become stereotype; but I, I praise my happy constitution, retain the spring unbroken. Fresh opulence and a new sphere of duties find me unabated in ardour and only more mature by knowledge. For this prospective change, Jean-Marie—it may probably have shocked you. Tell me now, did it not strike you as an inconsistency? Confess—it is useless to dissemble—it pained you?’



" 'Yes,' said the boy.

" 'You see,' returned the Doctor, with sublime fatuity, 'I read your thoughts! Nor am I surprised—your education is not yet complete; the higher duties of men have not been yet presented to you fully. A hint—till we have leisure—must suffice. Now that I am once more in possession of a modest competence; now that I have so long prepared myself in silent meditation, it becomes my superior duty to proceed to Paris. My scientific training, my undoubted command of language, mark me out for the service of my country. Modesty in such a case would be a snare. If sin were a philosophical expression, I should call it sinful. A man must not deny his manifest abilities, for that is to evade his obligations. I must be up and doing; I must be no skulker in life's battle.'

"So he rattled on, copiously greasing the joint of his inconsistency with words; while the boy listened silently, his eyes fixed on the horse, his mind seething. It was all lost eloquence; no array of words could unsettle a belief of Jean-Marie's; and he drove into Fontainebleau filled with pity, horror, indignation, and despair.

"In the town Jean-Marie was kept a fixture on the driving-seat, to guard the treasure; while the Doctor, with a singular, slightly tipsy airiness of manner, fluttered in and out of cafés, where he shook hands with garrison officers, and mixed an absinthe with the nicety of old experience; in and out of shops, from which he returned laden with

costly fruits, real turtle, a magnificent piece of silk for his wife, a preposterous cane for himself, and a képi of the newest fashion for the boy; in and out of the telegraph office, whence he despatched his telegram, and where three hours later he received an answer promising a visit on the morrow; and generally pervaded Fontainebleau with the first fine aroma of his divine good humour.

"The sun was very low when they set forth again; the shadows of the forest trees extended across the broad white road that led them home; the penetrating odour of the evening wood had already arisen, like a cloud of incense, from that broad field of tree-tops; and even in the streets of the town, where the air had been baked all day between white walls, it came in whiffs and pulses, like a distant music. Half-way home, the last gold flicker vanished from a great oak upon the left; and when they came forth beyond the borders of the wood, the plain was already sunken in pearly greyness, and a great, pale moon came swinging skyward through the filmy poplars.

"The Doctor sang, the Doctor whistled, the Doctor talked. He spoke of the woods, and the wars, and the deposition of dew; he brightened and babbled of Paris; he soared into cloudy bombast on the glories of the political arena. All was to be changed; as the day departed, it took with it the vestiges of an outworn existence, and to-morrow's sun was to inaugurate the new. 'Enough,' he cried, 'of this life of maceration!' His wife (still beautiful, or he was

sadly partial) was to be no longer buried; she should now shine before society. Jean-Marie would find the world at his feet; the roads open to success, wealth, honour, and posthumous renown. 'And O, by the way,' said he, 'for God's sake keep your tongue quiet! You are, of course, a very silent fellow; it is a quality I gladly recognise in you—silence, golden silence! But this is a matter of gravity. No word must get abroad; none but the good Casimir is to be trusted; we shall probably dispose of the vessels in England.'

"'But are they not even ours?' the boy said, almost with a sob—it was the only time he had spoken.

"'Ours in this sense, that they are nobody else's,' replied the Doctor. 'But the State would have some claim. If they were stolen, for instance, we should be unable to demand their restitution; we should have no title; we should be unable even to communicate with the police. Such is the monstrous condition of the law.<sup>1</sup> It is a mere instance of what remains to be done, of the injustices that may yet be righted by an ardent, active, and philosophical deputy.'

"Jean-Marie put his faith in Madame Desprez; and as they drove forwards down the road from Bourron, between the rustling poplars, he prayed in his teeth, and whipped up the horse to an unusual speed. Surely, as soon as they arrived, madame would assert her character, and bring this waking nightmare to an end.

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<sup>1</sup> Let it be so for my tale.

"Their entrance into Grez was heralded and accompanied by a most furious barking; all the dogs in the village seemed to smell the treasure in the noddy. But there was no one in the street, save three lounging landscape painters at Tentaillon's door. Jean-Marie opened the green gate and led in the horse and carriage; and almost at the same moment Madame Desprez came to the kitchen threshold with a lighted lantern; for the moon was not yet high enough to clear the garden walls.

" 'Close the gates, Jean-Marie!' cried the Doctor, somewhat unsteadily alighting. 'Anastasie, where is Aline?'

" 'She has gone to Montereau to see her parents,' said madame.

" 'All is for the best!' exclaimed the Doctor fervently. 'Here, quick, come near to me; I do not wish to speak too loud,' he continued. 'Darling, we are wealthy!'

" 'Wealthy!' repeated the wife.

" 'I have found the treasure of Franchard,' replied her husband. 'See, here are the first fruits; a pineapple, a dress for my ever-beautiful—it will suit her—trust a husband's, trust a lover's, taste! Embrace me, darling! This grimy episode is over; the butterfly unfolds its painted wings. To-morrow Casimir will come; in a week we may be in Paris—happy at last! You shall have diamonds. Jean-Marie, take it out of the boot, with religious care, and bring it piece by piece into the dining-room. We shall have plate at table! Darling, hasten and pre-

pare this turtle; it will be a whet—it will be an addition to our meagre ordinary. I myself will proceed to the cellar. We shall have a bottle of that little Beaujolais you like, and finish with the Hermitage; there are still three bottles left. Worthy wine for a worthy occasion.'

"'But, my husband; you put me in a whirl,' she cried. 'I do not comprehend.'

"'The turtle, my adored, the turtle!' cried the Doctor; and he pushed her towards the kitchen, lantern and all.

"Jean-Marie stood dumfounded. He had pictured to himself a different scene—a more immediate protest, and his hope began to dwindle on the spot.

"The Doctor was everywhere, a little doubtful on his legs, perhaps, and now and then taking the wall with his shoulder; for it was long since he had tasted absinthe, and he was even then reflecting that the absinthe had been a misconception. Not that he regretted excess on such a glorious day, but he made a mental memorandum to beware; he must not, a second time, become the victim of a deleterious habit. He had his wine out of the cellar in a twinkling; he arranged the sacrificial vessels, some on the white table-cloth, some on the sideboard, still crusted with historic earth. He was in and out of the kitchen, plying Anastasie with vermouth, heating her with glimpses of the future, estimating their new wealth at ever larger figures; and before they sat down to supper, the lady's virtue had melted in

the fire of his enthusiasm, her timidity had disappeared; she, too, had begun to speak disparagingly of the life at Grez; and as she took her place and helped the soup, her eyes shone with the glitter of prospective diamonds.

"All through the meal, she and the Doctor made and unmade fairy plans. They bobbed and bowed and pledged each other. Their faces ran over with smiles; their eyes scattered sparkles, as they projected the Doctor's political honours and the lady's drawing-room ovations.

" 'But you will not be a Red!' cried Anastasie.

" 'I am Left Centre to the core,' replied the Doctor.

" 'Madame Gastein will present us—we shall find ourselves forgotten,' said the lady.

" 'Never,' protested the Doctor. 'Beauty and talent leave a mark.'

" 'I have positively forgotten how to dress,' she sighed.

" 'Darling, you make me blush,' cried he. 'Yours has been a tragic marriage!'

" 'But your success—to see you appreciated, honoured, your name in all the papers, that will be more than pleasure—it will be heaven!' she cried.

" 'And once a week,' said the Doctor, archly scanning the syllables, 'once a week—one good little game of baccarat?'

" 'Only once a week?' she questioned, threatening him with a finger.

" 'I swear it by my political honour,' cried he.

" 'I spoil you,' she said, and gave him her hand.

"He covered it with kisses.

"Jean-Marie escaped into the night. The moon swung high over Grez. He went down to the garden end and sat on the jetty. The river ran by with eddies of oily silver, and a low, monotonous song. Faint veils of mist moved among the poplars on the farther side. The reeds were quietly nodding. A hundred times already had the boy sat, on such a night, and watched the streaming river with untroubled fancy. And this perhaps was to be the last. He was to leave this familiar hamlet, this green, rustling country, this bright and quiet stream; he was to pass into the great city; his dear lady mistress was to move bedizened into saloons; his good, garrulous, kind-hearted master to become a brawling deputy; and both be lost for ever to Jean-Marie and their better selves. He knew his own defects; he knew he must sink into less and less consideration in the turmoil of a city life; sink more and more from the child into the servant. And he began dimly to believe the Doctor's prophecies of evil. He could see a change in both. His generous incredulity failed him for this once; a child must have perceived that the Hermitage had completed what the absinthe had begun. If this were the first day, what would be the last? 'If necessary, wreck the train,' thought he, remembering the Doctor's parable. He looked round on the delightful scene; he drank deep of the charmed night air, laden with the scent of hay. 'If necessary, wreck the train,'

he repeated. And he rose and returned to the house.

"The next morning there was a most unusual outcry in the Doctor's house. The last thing before going to bed, the Doctor had locked up some valuables in the dining-room cupboard; and behold, when he rose again, as he did about four o'clock, the cupboard had been broken open, and the valuables in question had disappeared. Madame and Jean-Marie were summoned from their rooms, and appeared in hasty toilets; they found the Doctor raving, calling the heavens to witness and avenge his injury, pacing the room bare-footed, with the tails of his night-shirt flirting as he turned.

"'Gone!' he said; 'the things are gone, the fortune gone! We are paupers once more. Boy! what do you know of this? Speak up, sir, speak up. Do you know of it? Where are they?' He had him by the arm, shaking him like a bag, and the boy's words, if he had any, were jolted forth in inarticulate murmurs. The Doctor, with a revulsion from his own violence, set him down again. He observed Anastasie in tears. 'Anastasie,' he said, in quite an altered voice, 'compose yourself, command your feelings. I would not have you give way to passion like the vulgar. This—this trifling accident must be lived down. Jean-Marie, bring me my smaller medicine chest. A gentle laxative is indicated.'

"And he dosed the family all around, leading the way himself with a double quantity. The wretched Anastasie, who had never been ill in the whole course



of her existence, and whose soul recoiled from remedies, wept floods of tears as she sipped, and shuddered and protested, and then was bullied and shouted at until she sipped again. As for Jean-Marie, he took his portion down with stoicism.

" 'I have given him a less amount,' observed the Doctor, 'his youth protecting him against emotion. And now that we have thus parried any morbid consequences, let us reason.'

" 'I am so cold,' wailed Anastasie.

" 'Cold!' cried the Doctor. 'I give thanks to God that I am made of fierier material. Why, madame, a blow like this would set a frog into a transpiration. If you are cold, you can retire; and, by the way, you might throw me down my trousers. It is chilly for the legs.' "

This is near the top of Stevensonian humor. But do not imagine that the Doctor loses his philosophy. He only changes it.—Always thus with optimists. He of course fails utterly to discover the criminal. For how could philosophy which had been the teacher of common sense hope to detect it! His inductive process of reasoning is perfect. Anastasie is more than ever convinced that her husband is a genius. All the evidence leads straight to Jean-Marie; but obviously, as Desprez's pupil, he is above suspicion. It is only when Casimir, the city man without sentiments, arrives, that Desprez is convinced. Being convinced, however, makes no difference. Desprez refuses to believe. " 'If that boy

came and told me so himself, I should not believe him; and if I did believe him, so implicit is my trust, I should conclude that he had acted for the best.' 'Well, well,' said Casimir, indulgently. 'Have you a light? I must be going.' "

The rationalization of the Doctor now follows. A tornado blows down his house, his investments in "Turks," which Casimir has vainly tried to make him sell, go to smash. He is ruined. And meanwhile Jean-Marie watches dolefully for the proper moment. At last it arrives. Of course, they all think that Jean-Marie has deserted them when he saw that nothing more was to be gained. Romantic Optimism, Female Propriety, Practical Unimportance—Desprez, Anastasie, Casimir, that is—all think that perverse Natural Sense has turned hypocrite. He has, however, only gone to fetch, at the right moment, their *sine qua non*.

" 'Hullo,' cried Casimir, 'there goes the stable-boy with his luggage; no, egad, he is taking it into the inn.'

"And sure enough, Jean-Marie was seen to cross the snowy street and enter Tentailon's, staggering under a large hamper.

"The Doctor stopped with a sudden, wild hope.

" 'What can he have?' he said. 'Let us go and see.' And he hurried on.

" 'His luggage, to be sure,' answered Casimir. 'He is on the move—thanks to the commercial imagination.'

"‘I have not seen that hamper for—for ever so long,’ remarked the Doctor.

"‘Nor will you see it much longer,’ chuckled Casimir; ‘unless, indeed, we interfere. And by the way, I insist on an examination.’

"‘You will not require,’ said Desprez, positively with a sob; and, casting a moist, triumphant glance at Casimir, he began to run.

"‘What the devil is up with him, I wonder?’ Casimir reflected; and then, curiosity taking the upper hand, he followed the Doctor’s example and took to his heels.

"The hamper was so heavy and large, and Jean-Marie himself so little and so weary, that it had taken him a great while to bundle it upstairs to the Desprez’ private room; and he had just set it down on the floor in front of Anastasie, when the Doctor arrived, and was closely followed by the man of business. Boy and hamper were both in a most sorry plight; for the one had passed four months underground in a certain cave on the way to Achères, and the other had run about five miles, as hard as his legs would carry him, half that distance under a staggering weight.

"‘Jean-Marie,’ cried the Doctor, in a voice that was only too seraphic to be called hysterical, ‘is it—? It is!’ he cried. ‘O, my son, my son!’ And he sat down upon the hamper and sobbed like a little child.

"‘You will not go to Paris, now,’ said Jean-Marie sheepishly.

“‘Casimir,’ said Desprez, raising his wet face, ‘do you see that boy, that angel boy? He is the thief; he took the treasure from a man unfit to be entrusted with its use; he brings it back to me when I am sobered and humbled. These, Casimir, are the Fruits of my Teaching, and this moment is the Reward of my Life.’

“‘*Tiens,*’ said Casimir.”—“The Treasure of Franchard,” *The Merry Men*, etc.

It may be said that in all Stevenson there is but one doctrine: Expand the fine and enjoyable part of your own nature. Of this Stevenson’s philosophy is but a constant development and restatement. His stories are again and again its illustration. He treats the matter in many ways: lightly and personally as in “Ordered South” and “An Apology for Idlers”; with calm seriousness as in “Aes Triplex”; whimsically as in “Franchard”; with terrible force in the parables of *Dr. Jekyll* and “Markheim.” But it is ever a vision that touches the same truth.

And this is Stevenson’s chief claim to distinction—that he has made one of the great moral doctrines of life vivid, viewed it from every side, understood all its significances, its multiplicity of contacts. The ordinary man repeats: “Oh, yes, cheerfulness and courage are fine qualities. Be cheerful, be brave. Be on the positive side of life. You will be happier and more successful. Stick to your better self, your true nature,” etc. These are the tedious generalities

of the ordinary man. Stevenson lets the doctrine permeate life. With him it becomes the guiding principle. In religion, in morals, in art, in friendship, in intellectual growth, in the progress of a realistic and material civilization, it has the same mission. It is this which gives force and unity to Stevenson's work and which led the public to expect a certain rather definite thing from him, in spite of the varying shapes with which his imagination was endowing it.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE MIRROR OF THE SOUTH SEAS

#### I

**B**Y the time of Stevenson's second brief sojourn in America and departure to the South Seas, the public had come to regard him as their most entertaining and perhaps their most significant moralist. He humanized afresh and brought into the sun much of the wisdom of the storehouses—much that young men of his day were looking for, and might have found in Epictetus, Montaigne, Hazlitt, or Emerson. Stevenson's originality can be truly perceived only by one who comes directly from Stevenson's favorite reading in these authors. His originality consisted very largely in learning their careful wisdom with more daring enthusiasm; and it is difficult for us of a later generation, which has had its fill of "morals" if ever a generation has had, to realize how fresh, even how revolutionary, Stevenson's doctrine sounded to the youth of England and New England who were being brought up literally on the catechism, and who, like their fathers, had been taught to sniff the smoke of the under-

✓ world in every wind of destiny. It may be a true creed, that old one—it may be that, even in childhood or before birth, we are all hell-scorched and devil-bitten; but that is not the valuable thing to think on in youth. Stevenson's mission was to bring once more a positive message to his fellow victims. No philosopher whom they were capable of understanding had spoken out so sanely and so enthusiastically about the immediate concerns of youthful thought—about courage, and anarchy, and love, and success. His reasonings were not abstract; his examples were intimate. For many a young man, they seemed to put the stamp of high seriousness on those latent notions which he had long sneakily suspected of being the better part of his nature. Now he had the courage of his suspicions and could look the world in the face.

Thus, though Stevenson was the author of many other things which an admiring public was ready to accept, he undoubtedly had his serious regard as a man devoted to the discovery of a fresh and more positive outlook on life. His sermons were sometimes very definitely sermons; oftener they were essays and fables. In any case he came to be cherished as a most stimulating, a most graceful, and certainly as the least tedious, preacher whom preacher-loving Americans and English had found for a generation. The fact that the preacher was himself a man with one foot in the grave who yet told splendid stories of youth and courage, gave his morality only the greater weight. He spoke

out of experience and out of imagination, but never out of dogma or mere theory.

At the flood-tide of popular interest, and enormously enhancing the character of it, the adventurer in fictions and moralities embarked on the sea of true romance. Nothing has ever interested the contemporary world in a literary career so much as the voyages of Stevenson in 1888 across the face of the Pacific in search of health, and his settling at last in 1890 on the island of Upolu in Samoa. It was wonderfully stirring to the imagination. It opened a vista. It taught Europe a new geography. That the author of *Treasure Island* was himself chartering a topsail schooner and going on a hunt for something more precious than gold, something which would perhaps prove to be over the edge of the map, fascinated all of us in that day. No doubt we expected a new marvelous romance of the sea as the natural result. And a few of us professed to find it in *The Wrecker*, a tale conceived and written in a ship's cabin.

But the significant thing about Stevenson's South Sea writings, taken as a whole, is not the spirit of far adventure in them. Though they are most fanciful, they are also the most realistically inspired of all his work; and their great significance is the criticism they make of what seems to most people the realest thing in history—the "success," or, as one must say in the light of the Great War, the power, of our commercial civilization.

It is difficult to explain just what this criticism



consists in, for it is a criticism of civilization that rests on a philosophy as yet not well formulated—a philosophy that exists sanely only in its illustrations in works of fiction and travel. Its clearest popular exponent is for the moment Jack London, in his terrible story, *The Call of the Wild*, and in certain shorter tales; and by far its subtlest expression lies in the romances of Joseph Conrad. But Stevenson's *Ebb Tide*, "The Beach of Falesá," and certain pages of *The Wrecker* are evidences of the same kind of thought.

Primitivism, it is true, has often been a motive in art and in philosophy. It was such a hundred years ago with the socialistic poets and philosophers who for the most part romanticized it. They claimed that a return to the "natural" state would enable men to perceive what is unessential in their present accumulation of conventions, and to grow up again clearer minded and less encumbered, and hence in closer personal sympathy with one another. But the present group of socialistic writers, with whom Stevenson has certain affinities, show us the matter less theoretically. They tell the story of human nature as it would be without the all-valuable veneer. In the light of various types of primitivism, somewhere out on the borders of society, the character of modern civilization is symbolically reflected and becomes less inscrutable. The South Seas are a mirror for Europe, where a carefully bred Englishman, let us say, may see himself stripped of his morals, his tastes, his clothes, and most of his other

clever adjustments to implacable nature. What is he like in this mirror?

The sight at first disgusts, then fascinates, and at last inspires. Man is still so much an animal; yes, but a God-made animal. He is real. He can not be denaturalized. He is part of evolution. "I love the Polynesian," Stevenson writes to Low: "This civilization of ours is a dingy, ungentlemanly business; it drops out too much of man, and too much of that the very beauty of the poor beast; who has his beauties in spite of Zola and Co."

Out on the borderlands we can see what the elemental laws really are and what they signify. In society, for instance, we talk about private ambitions; in the borderland that is just a law—it can not be escaped—and it is called the law of club and fang. How horribly plain that becomes in Jack London's *Call of the Wild*. How the veneer cracks off, and how infinitely valuable it at once appears to be. Obviously, it is the veneer that we must improve, not the law that we must try to change. For the law is the survival of the fittest, the law that includes all others, the law that itself is civilization. It is on this law that the socialistic argument depends; for this is also the law of the unity of all nature. It is the law which says that we are all directed by the same fundamental passions. In society we have a saying that one should control these passions, and we accordingly describe them to suit ideals of self-control, love, honor, loyalty, in our parlance. In the far mirror of the sea it is

plain that they are meant to be embodied rather than controlled, if one would survive; and hence they appear more crudely as sexual desire, physical courage, family instinct.

And now it becomes apparent why barbarism is so interesting to us, why "The Beach of Falesá" and parts of *In the South Seas* are absorbing reading. It is not just because of the strangeness of it all. It is really because of its awful familiarity. It lurks under our skins. It beats in the pulse of our cities. For barbarism, with its squalor, its brutality, its crude struggle for the upper hand, or else with its cheerful passivity, its sensuous abandon, its indifference to fate, makes perfectly plain what is still going on among ourselves in a more complicated, a more inscrutable, but no less inevitable fashion.

Let us look at an illustration.

The beach of Falesá is one of the outposts of civilization in the midst of the sea—that is, a trading station. For it is barter that makes civilized laws necessary and that ultimately brings in the soundest notions of responsibility, trust, and justice. But when Wiltshire comes to his new station at Falesá, laws are very distant, usually a couple of thousand of miles or so, though shadowed forth now and then by the steamer or the missionary. Other ideas, however, take their places: the native superstitions; sheer competition—all's fair in trade and war, which is only another way of saying that trade is war; and finally the universal instinct of family and sex.

These things, if thoroughly understood are pretty definite matters. But Wiltshire is ignorant of the exact nature of Falesá superstition; he is fooled by Mr. Case into believing that the rule of competition has been temporarily suspended in favor of cooperation; and he is for some time rather skeptical about the moral value of the universal instinct, so far as it concerns the Kanaka girl whom he takes to wife. It is a fair confusion, typical of the conflict of notions from which civilized custom has arisen.

Thus the most interesting thing in the story is Wiltshire's psychology. He has been leading a solitary life on an island where there are no other white men. At Falesá there are three—two whites and a negro. They will be his rivals in the copra trade; but rivalry, with company, is welcome. However, it is not exactly rivalry, he is to meet. It is rivalry removed from all thought of responsibility, trust, or justice. Mr. Case, the fakir and sensualist, typifies the horrible nature of competition under such conditions. Wiltshire and Uma, on the other hand, have the decent streak in their natures that has always wrought civilization instead of animalism out of human relationships. Its development, under these circumstances, is the essence of the story. Yet were the plot adapted to a civilized setting this development would not be any too obvious. It requires the beach of Falesá and its morals to illustrate the point.

Wiltshire is welcomed to the beach by Case, who

immediately reminds him that the first thing on the program is to pick out a wife. They review the crowd of island girls who are all dressed out because of the arrival of the ship; but Wiltshire takes a fancy to Uma, a girl slenderer and more timid than the others, whom he sees coming up from fishing attired only in a chemise. Case does the wooing in the Falesá dialect which Wiltshire does not understand. Then they are married by the negro, and Case writes out Uma's certificate to the effect that she is "illegally" married to Mr. John Wiltshire and that he may send her packing when he pleases. "A nice paper to put in a girl's hand and see her hide away like gold," says Wiltshire, who adds that this practise is all due to the missionaries, for if it weren't for the notions they put into girls' heads no such deception would be necessary.

This bit of morality is the first stirring of Wiltshire's conscience. It develops with amazing rapidity through the devotion that Uma shortly inspires, and through the peculiar situation in which he finds that she has placed him. The marriage has been a trick of Case's—Uma belongs to another island and she is taboo in Falesá. So long as she stays with him, Wiltshire can not sell a yard of calico or buy a pound of copra. But he does not throw her over. Case had told her that he was wild about her and cared nothing for the taboo; and now Wiltshire proceeds to get even with Case. That makes the *finale* of the story, but not the best part of it. The best part is at the beginning—as

nearly always in Stevenson—about the development of Wiltshire's romantic moral sense, and about his true marriage performed by the visiting missionary. Here there is a curious thing that must not pass unnoticed. Wiltshire is in a situation that would develop a conscience, if ever a man was; but between the devotion of Uma, on the one hand, and the utter treachery of Case, on the other, he acts according to absolute instinct. Convention can hardly be said to guide him at all. It will occur to the reader only afterward that his conduct is just what European convention would also demand of him.

This first part of the story, told in Wiltshire's peculiarly picturesque vocabulary and strain of original wisdom, is undoubtedly at Stevenson's highest pitch. The whole temperament of the trader, as a restless vagabond who has yet been forced to do a good deal of quiet thinking during long island exiles, a man whose morals are not all they should be but whose deductions from experience are unquestionable, is a careful and serious creation. His sentiment and imagination belong to him alone. For ninety pages he is a masterpiece. Then the plot swallows him, or, rather, cuts him off, and he vanishes, like too many of Stevenson's characters, into the mechanics of melodrama.

I do not mean that there is anything unlikely in the "devil work" at the end of "The Beach of Falesá." It is true enough to island superstition. But compared to the similar coloring in "The Isle

of Voices," for instance, it fails lamentably. The emphasis is all on a lurid realism, which is against Stevenson's own rule.

## II

There must perhaps be the same final judgment of *The Ebb-Tide*, which has an entrancingly true and romantic start on the beach of Papeete, the work of Lloyd Osbourne, and then a dime-novel climax on Attwater's mysterious island. But meanwhile the story, though nowhere done with the genius that marks the delineation of Wiltshire's character, is a more evenly sustained piece of work, having a more definite purpose. *The Ebb-Tide* is distinctly one of Stevenson's moral fables. It might be compared to *Dr. Jekyll*; and though I have heard it argued that it is just a wild romantic tale, the title, and the motto, and the last three chapters, are written for him who can read morality and not for the plot-sleuth.

It is a fable of the relation of Evil to Fate, and its significance depends very largely on its setting in a part of the world where any connection between the two is often so vague as to appear a mere accident. The writer's problem was therefore to make the evil reside in a course of characteristic and logical actions by the *dramatis personæ*, and then to give the atmosphere of fate that surrounds them a portentous, arbitrary, even God-like, quality, such as fate has where the influence of moral obligations

is no more sharply felt than that of weather two thousand miles off. It is this quality of fate in barbaric civilization that produces its myths. So in the story this quality for a time hides the fact that fate has all along resided with the evil in the course of evil action, and not in external circumstances. In the end, the more intelligent of the characters is brought to understand that the results are logical, that the net which encloses him and his two pals has not dropped from the sky, but is entirely of their own weaving. Attwater is an avenger only because they make him such. Hence Attwater is for them a sort of mythical deity, or, as Herrick puts it, he "looks at us and laughs like God." The whole thing symbolizes the character of crime and of that inly-working power which brings a criminal to justice.

The story is about three men who are "on the beach" at Papeete. Herrick and Davis, a university man and a sea-captain, have seen better days. Huish, the cockney, one of Stevenson's masterly creations, may be with them as a result of something worse than ill-fortune and mere "bad character." Papeete would like to be rid of all three, and a golden opportunity soon offers. A pest-ridden schooner anchors off the harbor, her captain and mate dead of the smallpox. Davis, with his pals as mate and cook, is put in charge. No one else will touch the job. Now there is more than smallpox the matter with the *Farallone*, bound "out of 'Frisco for Sydney, in California champagne." For the cham-



pagne, as the new "officers" soon discover in their tippling, is mostly bottled water. Hence it is obvious that she was never intended to arrive in Sydney or any other regular port. She was intended for a tale to the insurance companies. Of course the new officers are not above seeing a nice little chance for themselves in all this, a rather better chance than that offered by their original plan of trying to sell the champagne in Peru instead of in Sydney.

But while their broaching the cargo saved them from making that mistake, they soon discover something that would have effectually prevented them from carrying out a fool's errand, and that also threatens to spoil the new plan of getting the *Farallone* back on her course, wrecking her, and then blackmailing the owners. Their new plan of blackmail is spoiled by their shiftlessness in the first instance. They suddenly discover that the provisions on the *Farallone* were calculated to hold out only a little farther than Papeete, and here they are well on their islandless course to Peru with not enough rations left to get anywhere at all. There is a good deal of cursing fate, though as yet they don't understand what fate really is. Then a thing happens which seems just like Providence. Attwater's uncharted atoll springs up out of the sea, heralding itself by the reflections of its lagoon on the sky.

That is the beginning of the story as far as I need remind you; and, thanks to Huish's insubordination and sheer cussedness, it makes a mar-

velously good yarn for one hundred and thirty pages. The fable element now grows in importance and you not only have to keep your eyes about you, but to cast them back over the beginning, if you hope to understand it from the author's point of view.

Huish, Davis, and Herrick are gradations in the courage and purpose of evil. Huish is the strongest of the three because he is beyond pangs of conscience and repentance. He never wavers. Davis and Herrick would like to reform if they had a permanent chance—Davis because he is tired of evil life as uncomfortable and unsocial, and Herrick because he has still some shreds of conscience. It is Herrick's conscience that renders him weak, sensitive, will-less. Though he can rise above some petty dissipation like champagne, he is dominated by Davis in all important decisions. And just so Davis is dominated by Huish; for Huish expresses the stronger side of Davis's character as a force for evil.

These three souls play out their little game against Fate. At every turn they lose. Herrick alone, the weaker, more imaginative, more intelligent nature, perceives vaguely what is beating them—that it is their own evil and not the unfortunate externals in the situation. So when Providence Itself seems to arrive on the scene and rescue them with an uncharted island containing the gigantic shape of Attwater, Herrick soon recognizes that this is not beneficent Providence, but a terrible ultimate revenge. Huish and Davis go about to conquer it, to conquer Fate! and the irony of the case drives Herrick wild.

He attempts suicide, but Attwater rescues him, and thus his weakness in evil becomes his salvation. So it is, in the end, with Davis. Rendered utterly defenseless, after Huish takes his little fling at Fate with a bottle of vitriol, Davis at last discovers, in the further nothingness of his resources in evil, his positive freedom. And that is the doctrine which Fate really holds for us all.

So far as the art of the story is concerned, this moral is probably insisted on too late. There is the usual lack, in Stevenson's longer things, of a definite intellectual plan at the start. Though suggested by the story of the magic carpet which Herrick tells on the beach at Papeete, and by what each man wishes for—Huish's "B and S" being without question the best moment of his life—the moral idea of the whole tale dawns on the reader only about page one hundred and thirty. It requires an equal space to develop it, and the story henceforth, rather encumbered with it, is by no means as good reading as at first. It is possible that this is the way to drive home a moral—to surprise the reader with it half-way through a book. But I believe that if it were better prepared for, the end might have been, not the sooner, but the more rapidly, approached. The characters, after the middle of the story, fail to grow more real. Instead they become moral mouth-pieces. One can imagine how Joseph Conrad would have seized on the vital issues at this point, how he would have developed them in a definite atmosphere and have kept the people of the drama in livelier pos-

session of their temperaments—though nobody could possibly improve on Huish's vocabulary. Yet he would not succeed so well as Stevenson with the fabulous meaning, one of the most difficult ideas to handle in philosophy, and convincing perhaps only in the novels of Thomas Hardy.

### III

Stevenson has written two short and very perfect fables of the lust for gold as he saw it in that part of the world: "The Bottle Imp" and "The Isle of Voices." Conceived in the finest vein of his imagination and touched with the poetry of island life, they are more nearly *Polynesian* romances than anything else of their author's. "The Bottle Imp" is taken from a German story and vastly improved. No setting could suit the idea better than the Pacific. It was written for the natives and first printed in Samoan—a tale such as Tusitala, teller of tales, might be expected to invent. "The Isle of Voices" is about South Sea magic, which is quite unlike the magic of Jack and the Bean Stalk, Hans Andersen, or the Arabian Nights. One feels, in spite of himself, like the missionary in another of Stevenson's stories, that there is "something in it." It is full of a barbaric terror and superstition that is yet pervaded by a very real meaning and a vivid charm. The scenery is never a mere fairy-land scenery. The spell is that of reality. Mrs. Stevenson has said that she could never read it without seeing again

the lagoon at Fakarava where her husband had heard stories something like it from the half-caste governor as they sat on the beach in the evening. The governor believed his stories and the Stevensons did not wholly doubt them.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE MIRROR OF THE SOUTH SEAS: VAILIMA

#### I

FROM all these tales and their philosophy it would be obvious that the writer was a man who knew the islands, the natives, and the traders, with exceptional intimacy. Yet the extent of Stevenson's travels through Polynesia is not often appreciated, and before discussing his life in these parts and the volume about his cruises, *In the South Seas*, I wish to give here an itinerary which I believe is more exact than the reader will be apt to discover elsewhere.

The seventy-ton racing schooner, *Casco*, ninety-five feet in length, with Captain Otis, a cook, four deck-hands (sea-lawyers all of them), Mrs. Thomas Stevenson, Mrs. R. L. Stevenson, Lloyd Osbourne (then twenty years old), Valentine Roch (who the captain insisted should ship as cabin-boy) and R. L. S. sailed from San Francisco on June twenty-eighth, 1888, and sighted Nukuhiva in the Marquesas (high islands) just a month later. This was a voyage of some twenty-eight hundred sea miles nearly

southwest. In this general region they remained until Christmas day, when they left Tautira in the Island of Tahiti for Honolulu. They were at Nukuhiva, entertained by Prince Stanislao and the old cannibal queen, Vaekehu, until August twenty-second. On August twenty-third they reached Taahauku in Hiva-oa, and then left the Marquesas for the neighboring group of the Paumotos (low islands) September fourth, arriving at Fakarava September ninth, a voyage still southwest about six hundred miles. There they remained till the last week in September, and voyaged two days, in a more westerly direction, three hundred miles, to Papeete in the island of Tahiti (a high island). They encircled this island to Taravao on the south side, where Stevenson left the *Casco* and went sixteen miles in a cart to Tautira in order to escape mosquitoes and get into more sanitary quarters during a sharp illness. While the *Casco* was being repaired at Papeete, they lived in Tautira with Princess Moë and the sub-chief of the village, Ori, a very fine Polynesian, of surpassing generosity and courtesy. Leaving on Christmas day, they arrived in Honolulu, after a voyage of thirty days and some twenty-four hundred miles, almost due north, on January 24, 1889. The *Casco* was sent back to San Francisco, and also Valentine Roch returned to France.

Stevenson lived four miles out of Honolulu at Waikiki. He was not very well and found it difficult to work on *The Master*, which he finished in May.

He spent a week at the leper colony on the island of Molokai. From Honolulu Mrs. Thomas Stevenson went home to Scotland, Stevenson then expecting to follow before the end of the year.

On June twenty-fourth, Stevenson, his wife, Lloyd, and their cook, Ah Fu, whom they had picked up in the Marquesas in place of the original pseudo-Jap, took passage with Captain Reid on the trading schooner *Equator*, and arrived in Butaritari in the Gilberts (low islands), a journey of two thousand miles southwest, July thirteenth. It was on this voyage that Stevenson and Lloyd, in order to defray their expenses, began to construct the mad plot of *The Wrecker* from a mysterious yarn that had come to them in Honolulu. After some six weeks at Butaritari they went on two hundred miles in a southeasterly direction to Apemama, in the same group, arriving there September first. King Tembinok admitted them into the royal enclosure as his guests, giving Stevenson probably his most intimate taste of island life. They were there two months, returning to Butaritari in the *Equator*, and from thence cruising about in a general southeasterly direction and reaching Apia (Apia) in Upolu, of the Samoan group (high islands), a direct distance of fourteen hundred miles, on December 7, 1889.

As yet Stevenson had little thought of settling in Polynesia. He intended to collect material for his book concerning the islands and return to England via Sydney. But during January he bought four hundred acres behind Apia on Vaea Mountain and



of Voices," for instance, it fails lamentably. The emphasis is all on a lurid realism, which is against Stevenson's own rule.

## II

There must perhaps be the same final judgment of *The Ebb-Tide*, which has an entrancingly true and romantic start on the beach of Papeete, the work of Lloyd Osbourne, and then a dime-novel climax on Attwater's mysterious island. But meanwhile the story, though nowhere done with the genius that marks the delineation of Wiltshire's character, is a more evenly sustained piece of work, having a more definite purpose. *The Ebb-Tide* is distinctly one of Stevenson's moral fables. It might be compared to *Dr. Jekyll*; and though I have heard it argued that it is just a wild romantic tale, the title, and the motto, and the last three chapters, are written for him who can read morality and not for the plot-sleuth.

It is a fable of the relation of Evil to Fate, and its significance depends very largely on its setting in a part of the world where any connection between the two is often so vague as to appear a mere accident. The writer's problem was therefore to make the evil reside in a course of characteristic and logical actions by the *dramatis personæ*, and then to give the atmosphere of fate that surrounds them a portentous, arbitrary, even God-like, quality, such as fate has where the influence of moral obligations

is no more sharply felt than that of weather two thousand miles off. It is this quality of fate in barbaric civilization that produces its myths. So in the story this quality for a time hides the fact that fate has all along resided with the evil in the course of evil action, and not in external circumstances. In the end, the more intelligent of the characters is brought to understand that the results are logical, that the net which encloses him and his two pals has not dropped from the sky, but is entirely of their own weaving. Attwater is an avenger only because they make him such. Hence Attwater is for them a sort of mythical deity, or, as Herrick puts it, he "looks at us and laughs like God." The whole thing symbolizes the character of crime and of that inly-working power which brings a criminal to justice.

The story is about three men who are "on the beach" at Papeete. Herrick and Davis, a university man and a sea-captain, have seen better days. Huish, the cockney, one of Stevenson's masterly creations, may be with them as a result of something worse than ill-fortune and mere "bad character." Papeete would like to be rid of all three, and a golden opportunity soon offers. A pest-ridden schooner anchors off the harbor, her captain and mate dead of the smallpox. Davis, with his pals as mate and cook, is put in charge. No one else will touch the job. Now there is more than smallpox the matter with the *Farallone*, bound "out of 'Frisco for Sydney, in California champagne." For the cham-

pagne, as the new "officers" soon discover in their tipping, is mostly bottled water. Hence it is obvious that she was never intended to arrive in Sydney or any other regular port. She was intended for a tale to the insurance companies. Of course the new officers are not above seeing a nice little chance for themselves in all this, a rather better chance than that offered by their original plan of trying to sell the champagne in Peru instead of in Sydney.

But while their broaching the cargo saved them from making that mistake, they soon discover something that would have effectually prevented them from carrying out a fool's errand, and that also threatens to spoil the new plan of getting the *Farallone* back on her course, wrecking her, and then blackmailing the owners. Their new plan of blackmail is spoiled by their shiftlessness in the first instance. They suddenly discover that the provisions on the *Farallone* were calculated to hold out only a little farther than Papeete, and here they are well on their islandless course to Peru with not enough rations left to get anywhere at all. There is a good deal of cursing fate, though as yet they don't understand what fate really is. Then a thing happens which seems just like Providence. Attwater's uncharted atoll springs up out of the sea, heralding itself by the reflections of its lagoon on the sky.

That is the beginning of the story as far as I need remind you; and, thanks to Huish's insubordination and sheer cussedness, it makes a mar-

velously good yarn for one hundred and thirty pages. The fable element now grows in importance and you not only have to keep your eyes about you, but to cast them back over the beginning, if you hope to understand it from the author's point of view.

Huish, Davis, and Herrick are gradations in the courage and purpose of evil. Huish is the strongest of the three because he is beyond pangs of conscience and repentance. He never wavers. Davis and Herrick would like to reform if they had a permanent chance—Davis because he is tired of evil life as uncomfortable and unsocial, and Herrick because he has still some shreds of conscience. It is Herrick's conscience that renders him weak, sensitive, will-less. Though he can rise above some petty dissipation like champagne, he is dominated by Davis in all important decisions. And just so Davis is dominated by Huish; for Huish expresses the stronger side of Davis's character as a force for evil.

These three souls play out their little game against Fate. At every turn they lose. Herrick alone, the weaker, more imaginative, more intelligent nature, perceives vaguely what is beating them—that it is their own evil and not the unfortunate externals in the situation. So when Providence Itself seems to arrive on the scene and rescue them with an uncharted island containing the gigantic shape of Attwater, Herrick soon recognizes that this is not beneficent Providence, but a terrible ultimate revenge. Huish and Davis go about to conquer it, to conquer Fate! and the irony of the case drives Herrick wild.

He attempts suicide, but Attwater rescues him, and thus his weakness in evil becomes his salvation. So it is, in the end, with Davis. Rendered utterly defenseless, after Huish takes his little fling at Fate with a bottle of vitriol, Davis at last discovers, in the further nothingness of his resources in evil, his positive freedom. And that is the doctrine which Fate really holds for us all.

So far as the art of the story is concerned, this moral is probably insisted on too late. There is the usual lack, in Stevenson's longer things, of a definite intellectual plan at the start. Though suggested by the story of the magic carpet which Herrick tells on the beach at Papeete, and by what each man wishes for—Huish's "B and S" being without question the best moment of his life—the moral idea of the whole tale dawns on the reader only about page one hundred and thirty. It requires an equal space to develop it, and the story henceforth, rather encumbered with it, is by no means as good reading as at first. It is possible that this is the way to drive home a moral—to surprise the reader with it half-way through a book. But I believe that if it were better prepared for, the end might have been, not the sooner, but the more rapidly, approached. The characters, after the middle of the story, fail to grow more real. Instead they become moral mouth-pieces. One can imagine how Joseph Conrad would have seized on the vital issues at this point, how he would have developed them in a definite atmosphere and have kept the people of the drama in livelier pos-

session of their temperaments—though nobody could possibly improve on Huish's vocabulary. Yet he would not succeed so well as Stevenson with the fabulous meaning, one of the most difficult ideas to handle in philosophy, and convincing perhaps only in the novels of Thomas Hardy.

### III

Stevenson has written two short and very perfect fables of the lust for gold as he saw it in that part of the world: "The Bottle Imp" and "The Isle of Voices." Conceived in the finest vein of his imagination and touched with the poetry of island life, they are more nearly *Polynesian* romances than anything else of their author's. "The Bottle Imp" is taken from a German story and vastly improved. No setting could suit the idea better than the Pacific. It was written for the natives and first printed in Samoan—a tale such as Tusitala, teller of tales, might be expected to invent. "The Isle of Voices" is about South Sea magic, which is quite unlike the magic of Jack and the Bean Stalk, Hans Andersen, or the Arabian Nights. One feels, in spite of himself, like the missionary in another of Stevenson's stories, that there is "something in it." It is full of a barbaric terror and superstition that is yet pervaded by a very real meaning and a vivid charm. The scenery is never a mere fairy-land scenery. The spell is that of reality. Mrs. Stevenson has said that she could never read it without seeing again

if they made the road he would like to name it 'The Road of the Grateful Hearts,' but they said no, it would be called 'The Road of the Loving Heart,' in the singular, and they asked me to copy out a paper they had written with that name, and all their titles attached, to be painted on a board and put up at the cross-roads."<sup>1</sup> Stevenson's friend, Mr. H. J. Moors of Apia, in whose reminiscences I believe you will find the truest, certainly the least flattering, picture of Stevenson in Samoa that has been made, says that while Stevenson cut no great figure in the minds of most white men in Samoa, to the natives he was a prophet. "By them he was honored as a man set apart from his fellows. They made the 'Road of Gratitude' . . . leading up to his house, in memory of a great kindness; and when he died they cut the track up the steep slope of Vaea that their Tusitala might be buried on the mountain-top 'where he longed to be.'"<sup>2</sup>

### III

It is his personal relations with Polynesians, rather than an objective and somewhat anthropological description of them, that forms the chief interest of his volume of cruises called *In the South Seas*. That a man like Stevenson spent five years among the islands is one of the important facts in the progress of civilization there. Not because he

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<sup>1</sup> *Memories of Vailima*, by Isobel Strong and Lloyd Osbourne, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> *With Stevenson in Samoa*, p. viii.

was bent on changing barbaric manners and customs, so many of which are gentility itself compared to certain others in Europe; but because he was bent on creating sympathy between men of different races. The value to the world of such documents as Ori's farewell at Tautira, on the one hand, and, on the other, the chapters about the cannibalism that existed next door to Ori, is inestimable. These things are done with an equally vivid comprehension. But the book as a whole could not be one of his literary successes. He makes the mistake of attempting to be every now and again impersonal instead of impressionistic. The tone of the thing is uneven, at one moment like an encyclopædia, at the next like a letter. The probability is that a book of travels will be chiefly interesting as it reveals the traveler. An impersonal traveler, is, in literature, a mere nonentity. So most people, who are not curious about Polynesian customs, find *In the South Seas* rather dull reading whenever the author is not in the foreground. Nearly all Stevenson's writings represent qualities, like romance or bravado or fine cheer, that were especially his own. A few chapters without a glimpse of the familiar gestures and attitudes, and we lose interest. *In the South Seas* is not very characteristic, nor does it go very deep. A successful struggle for vividness is accompanied by no very significant comment. It is the opposite of *The Amateur Emigrant*—the opposite one might say, of Stevenson himself. There is little emphasis, little exercise of choice.



Yet for this reason it may outwardly correspond all the better to the medley of scenes and peoples and customs strewn over the Pacific. Volcanoes, atolls, reefs, the roaring trades, the shining beaches, the fish beaked like parrots, the cannibal queens, Yankee traders, missionaries, pirates, murderers and French gendarmes, the long roll of Kanaka sailors and Chinese cooks, the native gifts and ceremonies, the kava-feasts, gin-feasts, tapus, the melodious dialects of the eastern islands, the rugged dialects of the western, the bar-rooms, trade-rooms, ships, harbors, whale-boats, crowds of natives in the cabin, crowds of drunken natives in their houses on shore, naked and black and wonderfully tattooed, or dressed in cotton shifts and picture hats—they pass in procession, now gaily, now grimly. But the whole thing somehow lacks an art, an art indescribable, yet one that another writer knew well how to use in his great medley epic of India—*Kim*.

The central theme of Stevenson's book, so far as it turns out to have one, seems to be a study of the invasions of civilization and trade into the barbarism of the islands. And here lies the moral of it all. Western civilization, clothes, Christian manners do not at first improve the barbaric state. They only disrupt and confuse it. This is what one would expect. Clothes bring ill health and a sense of shame but do not diminish sensuality. Christian manners seem only to emphasize, if not really to add a new field to the native superstitiousness and unreliability of mind. Trade brings in new diseases,

new forms of vice, absurd and utterly inartistic tastes. Civilization, as it reaches these barbarians, is a ridiculous parody of what we think it to consist in at home. And here we have again, in some sense, a mirror for our civilization, showing it in a new light. But it is not the mirror we expect an artist to hold up for us, the mirror which Conrad, or Kipling, or Pierre Loti has held up. There are not many pages in the whole volume of very distinguished observation. There is a continual sympathy and understanding which yet fails curiously to be very illuminating. Nor does Stevenson's art of description, at which he worked so consciously in youth, stand him in very good stead throughout the whole book. The best of it is undoubtedly the description of the king of Apemama in Part IV. This is the portrait of the man who embodies and appears to make consonant a strange medley of traits—originality, force, intelligence, utter laziness, and the old inherited superstitions and fears. Meanwhile Chapter IV in Part I, on "Death," an astounding testimony to the inroads of civilized diseases on some islands, and to the grim necessity of keeping down population by arbitrary methods on others, should make a wise man ponder. (After all, the planet is an island, and an island from which the possibility of voyaging seems hardly worth consideration.) The portrait of Vaekehu and Stanislaio in Chapter IX, the "story of a plantation" in Chapter XII—a sample that shows Stevenson's aptitude for those various pieces of historical writing he de-

signed but rarely carried out—the approach to and description of the atolls of the dangerous archipelago, especially of the beach at Fakarava, in Part II, are all remarkable pieces of writing.

## IV

Of all his literary work after 1888, it is quite possible that another generation will find the *Vailima Letters* to Colvin and other friends the outstanding product. Joseph Conrad, whose preference for *In the South Seas* to *Treasure Island* has been recorded in the Biographical Edition of the letters, may very likely prefer the letters to *The Ebb-Tide* and to *The Wrecker*. Among my own acquaintance, good judges of what has lasting interest and what has not, incline that way; and one thing about the comparison is obvious—the letters could be re-read oftener. Stevenson himself, toward the end of his life, seems to have preferred biography to most fiction.<sup>1</sup>

Like all of Stevenson's letters these from Vailima are among the pleasantest in English, and unlike his earlier letters they have little of that "authorship" style which so many critics have objected to. The epistolary authorship style is precisely like Stevenson in youth; the daily-news manner is like him at the age of forty. His letters from Mentone and Edinburgh show his enormous interest in the art of observation. His letters from Samoa show

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Gosse, Biographical Edition, Vol. IV, p. 211.

rather his untiring fidelity to the art of living. At forty in Samoa he was much closer to life, much more implicated in his environment, than he was at twenty-five in Edinburgh. His interest, therefore, is less in the telling, more in the thing itself, which always means with a writer that the distinction here implied has ceased to exist for him.

The original scheme of the Vailima letters was not quite fulfilled. Toward the end of 1890 when Stevenson was settling on his plantation, he began a sort of diary for Colvin which soon suggested to them the idea of having it published after his death. But the plan was no sooner definitely in mind than all regularity in making a diary was abandoned, and we have, instead of an interesting diary, a more interesting set of letters. For four years they reflect practically every phase of Stevenson's life and of his peculiar surroundings.

His literary work is still Stevenson's largest employment and occupies the largest place in his correspondence. This is worthy of remark; for, on the one hand, all the allurements of a tropical climate and the needs of health beckoned toward a life of extreme ease, and, on the other hand, the fascinating pursuits of supervising, building, estate-making, agriculture, called especially to Stevenson's enthusiasm for physical tasks. He might very well have lived cheaply, satisfied himself with the generous income he then had, and attempted no very long or trying flights. And had he done so, my own opinion is that we should be the gainers, that we

should have more tales like "The Beach of Falesá" and "The Bottle Imp," and none like *St. Ives* and *The Wrecker*. But Stevenson seems to have been little influenced mentally by the climatic relaxation. He still wrote nervously and without the calm full view. His energies still drew him into tasks where the prolonged vigorous thinking which he could not command could alone have guided him successfully.

As a critic, *ex post facto*, he is, however, as urbane, as little self-assured, as any man of his popular eminence whose letters we possess. He is no longer greatly deluded, either by the enthusiasm of beginnings or by the fact of making an end, into thinking the whole as good as it should be. It is only over Wiltshire in "The Beach," the morality of *The Ebb-Tide*, the "queer realism" of "The Isle of Voices," and "The Bottle Imp," which he rightly estimates as one of his "best works and ill to equal," that he expresses himself with any degree of ultimate satisfaction. About *The Ebb-Tide*, he was at first very doubtful. He says that there seemed to be "a veil of words" over it, and that he more and more likes "naked writing," and yet that with the longing for full color the veil comes again. *The Young Chevalier* (*St. Ives*), he says, is in very full color, and he fears it for that reason. There is a humorous letter, May 29-June 18, 1893, that tells of his struggles to finish *The Ebb-Tide*, how he can not get beyond page ninety-three of his manuscript, how he struggles up to page ninety-seven, but is thrust back, how he touches

page one hundred and one, fighting with dyspepsia and the effects of tobacco meanwhile, and at last, at 4:15 P. M. on June fifth, after "13 days about as nearly in hell as a man could expect to live through," he finishes the book.

In a letter, at this same time, to S. R. Crockett, in which he has spoken very dubiously of both *The Ebb-Tide* and *Weir of Hermiston*, he adds this postscript: "P. S.—Be it known to this fluent generation that I, R. L. S., in the forty-third year of my age and the twentieth of my professional life, wrote twenty-four pages in twenty-one days, working from six to eleven, and again in the afternoon from two to four or so, without fail or interruption. . . . Such was the facility of this prolific writer!" It might be expected that his correspondents' enthusiasm would not be very great over *The Ebb-Tide*, and Stevenson so far accepted Colvin's first judgment of the book as to wish Lloyd Osbourne's name removed from the title page so that responsibility for a second-rate thing would not rest on his young shoulders. But on another reading, Colvin somewhat changed his mind, and Mr. Osbourne has his share of the credit. When Stevenson read the "tract," as he called it, after publication, he apparently realized more clearly its import than he had been able to do before. When the mail brought the book, he retired with it and read it all before going to bed. He "did not dream it was near as good"; and was afraid he thought it excellent—"a little indecision about Attwater, not much."

About *St. Ives* he has, finally, little good to say—in spite of the enthusiasm of labor recorded so delightfully in the memoirs of his amanuensis. “A tissue of adventures,” Stevenson calls *St. Ives*, with “no style in particular”—a remark which shows that a *distinct tone* without much meaning was not *style* for R. L. S. “No philosophical pith under the yarn,” probably explains what he means by this. “No philosophy, no destiny to it,” he says again—“some of the happenings very good in themselves, I believe, but none of them *bildende*, none of them constructive, except in so far as they make up a kind of sham picture of the time, all in italics and all out of drawing.”

Of *David Balfour*, though he wrote Mrs. Sitwell that it was his high-water mark—a judgment based on his great partiality for the character of David—he could also say to W. H. Low that for the “top flower” of a man’s life it seemed inadequate: “Small is the word; it is a small age and I am of it.” *The Wrecker*, he tells Henry James, is a machine, a police machine; “but I believe the end is one of the most genuine butcheries in literature.” By this he probably refers to the pastoral dénouement at Barbizon and the way in which all the villains in the story go scot free. “It didn’t set up to be a book, only a long tough yarn,” he explained.<sup>1</sup>

Many such rather casual remarks, taken together

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<sup>1</sup> Every one who is interested in these books should read what Stevenson has to say regarding collaboration and the art of collaborate character drawing, in a letter to his cousin Bob. *Letters*, Biographical Edition, IV, p. 355.

with his acute and generous praise of contemporaries—of Kipling, Barrie, Weyman, Conan Doyle—show Stevenson as a man unusually free from that vanity of authorship which is often attributed to him. It has, in fact, been the habit of recent criticisms to confuse a type of vanity which he singularly lacked with the delightful vanity which Stevenson, the invalid, displayed on all occasions in recounting his triumphs of social or physical prowess, or in his similar pride in putting through the manual labor of book-making under trying conditions. His letter to George Meredith, which we have quoted, is the depth of that tone; and its lighter accents are audible in all those descriptions of his farm labors, his management of domestic affairs, and his position as adviser to the natives. It was part of Stevenson's character that, being denied a normal social and physical life, he should indulge a little bravado in that field whenever the chance offered. This explains the tone, the personality, of his earliest books of travel, and now once more it furnishes a zest for writing long letters about his adventures at Vailima.

In one of the first of them he has made a very poignant observation that all professional literary men will understand. He has been describing his enthusiasm for outdoor work, weeding, clearing, path-making, the oversight of laborers, which last delight, he says, "becomes a disease." "And the strange thing that I mark is this: If I go out and make sixpense, bossing my labourers and plying



the cutlass or the spade, idiot conscience applauds me; if I sit in the house and make twenty pounds, idiot conscience wails over my neglect and the day wasted."

It is typical of Stevenson that he should make a duty and a lark out of his labors. He was especially fond of exploring the thick hammock on his estate, either making a rough path with a machette or following up one of the streams to its source. To come back covered with mud and perspiration, to bathe and rest, and then concoct an elaborate salad for dinner, was one of the durable satisfactions of life. He has a great deal to say about the eccentricities of his horse Jack, and more about the follies of his native servants, Sosimo, beautiful Faauma of the light heart, the madness of Paatalise and its relief by a mysterious island drug, "pure Rider Haggard," the exact nature of which his foreman Lafaele kept a secret. There is an amazing tolerance of native ways, of their lies, stealing, and other tricks with which they passed the time. But other testimony than Stevenson's shows the respect in which he and his easy-going household were held, and the ultimate good which radiated from that center of human-heartedness, even to neighboring islands. Against a background of farm incidents—animals always escaping from the compound, men injuring themselves in a score of ways, Mrs. R. L. S. frequently ill; and to the accompaniment of bursts of tropic rain "demonizing" on the iron roof, or threatened hurricanes, Stevenson worked at literature.

Life did not lack for that excitement and variety which he seemed to require, and many circumstances, which for others are so often negative in their effect, he used on the positive side of existence. This is perhaps the last word that may be said concerning an optimist's character.

Among the more serious features of the correspondence is the constant evidence of Stevenson's part in local political affairs. Colvin, who rather deprecates this, has yet given a very concise and clear summary in the fourth volume of letters in the Biographical Edition, of the facts in the situation. There is a more elaborate and equally clear account in Moors's book. Armed with these explanations the reader has no difficulty in following Stevenson's references. They assume a large importance; and anybody with a real knowledge of Stevenson's mind will appreciate how deeply interested he could be in the questions of justice, especially of justice to the natives, which were involved in the international disputes at Samoa. The *Footnote to History* and the *Letters to "The Times"* are his real documents in the matter. But perhaps his pictures, in the letters, of Cedarkrantz and von Pilsach, the local officials, but really two characters out of *opera buffe*, and his many prophecies as to the outcome of entanglements, are more interesting to the casual reader. The Polynesian Stevenson seems to have known instinctively. Stanisla0 at Nukuhiva had flatteringly told him that if he would remain there he would be obeyed throughout the

islands. Mataafe, the rebel chief who came into power after Stevenson's death, and who had been his great friend among the Samoans, regarded Tusitala as his wisest adviser.

The most interesting single incidents in the letters are the expeditions to native villages, and the feasts at Vailima. In August, 1892, he took Lady Jersey, incognito, to visit Mataafe's court, where they spent the night and were honored, after breakfast, by a royal kava ceremony and much speech-making. At Vailima Stevenson entertained very lavishly—for the sake of the natives not least. Moors, who had a great deal to do with Stevenson's finances, thinks the household expenses amounted to some six thousand five hundred dollars a year, and that Stevenson spent in all about twenty thousand dollars on land and houses, which was, however, not more than one year's income from his books at this time. The great hall, sixty feet long and forty feet wide, lined and ceiled with California redwood, might have had an air of considerable magnificence; but it seems to have been curiously rather than beautifully furnished. Here the white citizens of Apia, the natives, the seamen and officers of cruising warships, especially of H. M. S. *Curaçoa*, were constantly welcomed. In photographs in Mr. Moors's book, in Hammerton's *Stevensoniana*, and in many magazine articles, you may see those medley assemblages and realize from them more vividly than in any other way the curious position of Tusitala, the Scot, in this far quarter of the globe.

In regard both to the outward facts of this final period and to the humors of his personality, the Vailima letters give a singularly complete impression which in no essential details is modified by the published gossip of visitors. To a student of his character these letters thus come as a crowning satisfaction. Stevenson was what he seemed to be, a man intensely interested in all the little details of immediate circumstance. Hence a man of very varying humor. He had none of the serenity of aloofness, none of the superiorities of preoccupation, and also none of its narrowness. He met life constantly. He never shirked. He had a dozen levels on which to meet it without ever reaching either pettiness or greatness. His friends seem not to have thought of him as a great man. Greatness has something dæmonic, something above and beyond our every-day scrutiny. Greatness is a powerful and a rare inspiration. It points toward the stars. In place of greatness Stevenson embodied, to a rare yet always comprehensible extent, human sympathy, which points toward the more immediate mysteries of daily life.

## CHAPTER XIV

### LOOKING DOWN FROM THE MILL

#### I

**A**CCORDING to wise men of all sorts there are only two forms of happiness in this world: the hopeful happiness of romance and the satisfied happiness of success. The web of life is made from their incessant interweaving. But while success is nominally the brighter strand in the pattern, the strand by which we oftenest recognize the pattern, it may be disputed which more strengthens the texture of the whole. Success, which puts the ultimate material value on the product, can, of course, be thought of as the ultimate purpose for which it has been made; but some people still believe that romance is the more essential element in its making and the truer measure of its worth. In less figurative language it may be said that one who lives for the sake of becoming a finished product is a devotee of success; and that one who prefers living to the material satisfactions of life is a follower of romance.

This is a very broad definition, and by it you will no doubt find many triflers, mediocrities, and pau-

pers already arrived on the docks of success, and many experts, geniuses, and millionaires, still voyaging on the ship of romance. On the whole, are not the followers of romance the happier men? Their wisdom begins where the others' wisdom leaves off, and their satisfactions, being satisfactions in eternal expectancy, are really the more constant. They more rarely come to an end. Is not their happiness, then, bound to go beyond the others'? For they will be satisfied with nothing short of the universe, while it is conceivable that the devotees of success could be persuaded to limit themselves to the planet.

It does no good to say that this is mere talk, and that since both types are actually limited to the planet, and hence must ultimately be practical and worldly, they will ultimately be one and the same. Is not the immediate reply to this that their most striking difference is observable in this very connection? The devotees of success are quite capable of filling the planet with themselves, and can be seen sitting down daily to take stock of that eminently practical achievement. But the followers of romance have already begun to deduce the universe, like the gods, from their station in the ether. That nothing may ever be done with their deductions to increase the stock of planetary success is quite beside the point. Even if a thousand generations hence the romancers still have not ascertained the practical value of their guesses, they will yet prove wiser than the devotees. For beside the devotees' worldly

wisdom, the profound depth of the romancers' experimental ignorance will be as an inexhaustible well of light.

But let us reduce the scale to something commensurate with our unepical imaginations. Happiness has often been described, and that by very wise old men, as of the valley. Toward the end of life, or at least after the storm and stress, it seems likely that a man will hit on this homely figure, and, fooling himself by a word, carry us along to believe that youth is less happy than age, when he means only that it is less satisfied. Doctor Johnson and Boswell were one day driving in a post-chaise. "Sir," said Boswell, "you observed one day at General Oglethorpe's that a man is never happy for the present but when he is drunk. Will you not add—or when driving rapidly in a post-chaise?" "No, sir," said Johnson, "you are driving rapidly *from* something or *to* something."

You will recall that in Doctor Johnson's famous story of Rasselas, the Happy Valley is a place of perfect content—in all respects save one. There is curiosity about the world and no way of satisfying it from afar. But after Rasselas, urged on by the tales of a poet, has made his escape from the valley and toured the world in search of another basis for human felicity than that of inaction, he finally returns satisfied that there is none, satisfied, in short, that happiness exists only in satisfaction undisturbed by curiosity and search. This is the happiness of the valley; and the valley is not a place from which

to contemplate the world, but in which to grow ignorant of it.

A hundred years later, the orthodox picture of happiness has considerably altered—just as the orthodox notion of eternity as a heaven of perfect bliss where nothing new ever happens has grown into a belief in eternal evolution. So, from our point of view, Stevenson's fable for philosophers of happiness, "Will o' the Mill," is a more reasonably constructed affair than was Doctor Johnson's. Stevenson has also another advantage than that of a later century—the advantage of writing his fable early in his own career instead of in old age. "Will o' the Mill," on his hillside above the plain, is, at all events, favorably situated. He is given a fair start. He is not buried in the prejudices of a valley. Nor is he so far dehumanized as to think satisfaction possible in a state that bars all hope. The Happy Valley was a self-contradiction. The Mill, however, is the apex of consistent idealism. It is a superb vantage point. The world is ever before it. It looks out over the world, understands the world, and yet is never of the world. That is its ideal position, its strong unpractical advantage. It sustains every hope but will risk no failures. Hence it is a place in which to grow worldly-wise without experience—an illuminating paradox, not an impossibility. It is not far different from our idea of the position of God in that spiritual wisdom toward which we strive to rise out of our terrible experience.



All life flows down past the Mill toward experience. Only a little rises to return. Life yearns for the plain. And the image of this for Will was the running water that went singing over the weir. The romance of the distant world, the lure of the open road, this feeling is for him, the foundation of knowledge and the explanation of history. "The running water carried his desires along with it as he dreamed over its fleeting surface." But his wisdom lay in images. The fat philosopher who took him out under the stars had shown him that actual experience could at the most cover but the smallest fraction of a man's knowledge, and often proved only a dulling of the imagination at that. Why not, then, know all life ideally as we know the stars? This one lesson taught Will more about the world than Imlac had been able to show Rasselas in their entire journey. So Will increased in wisdom till he was the teacher both of the many who were descending toward the plain and of those few who returned.

Will had already discovered that these men of action were not his opposites just because they went down into the plain. Indeed they were not his opposites at all. They were merely his complements. He could deduce them, as it were, from himself. His opposites he perhaps saw pictured in the fish in the stream. The stream flowed ever down into the plain; but the fish kept looking patiently in their own blind direction up-hill. And yet Will was like the fish in one respect. He never changed his theory; he never experimented. When he fell in love

he perceived only that by patient waiting happiness had come to his door. He had not sought it out. It was like an asset of contemplation, like a new hope, and then merely like an idea. So he realized that to possess it bodily would be directly against his whole philosophy. Even in regard to marriage, he therefore decided to remain a sheer romancer. This was his highest accomplishment and also the height of his vanity. At first he could not see that he had made a mistake. But presently the object of his romance married and then died, and he was left with his delicious fancies turned to stone upon his soul. He was not, however, disillusionized. Instead he made one of his wise sayings: "When I was a boy," he said, "I was a bit puzzled and hardly knew whether it was myself or the world that was curious and worth looking into. Now, I know it is myself, and stick to that." The idealist's refusal to act and to suffer results in a sort of cold wisdom that deadens the passions and leaves introspection to take the place of the greater romance of living.

In the end Will's lost experiences rise about him, like exhalations from the flowers of his garden which he had always refused to pluck, holding that his pleasure in them was greater where they were. He knows, as he welcomes death, that he has missed the fragrance of life.

## II

"What we want to see is one who can breast into the world, do a man's works, and still preserve his

first and pure enjoyment of existence," Stevenson quotes from Thoreau, and he has made the following maxims himself :

"Acts may be forgiven : not even God can forgive the hanger-back."

"No art is true in this sense : none can 'compete with life' ! not even history."

"There is more adventure in the life of the workingman who descends as a common soldier in the battle of life, than that of the millionaire who sits apart in an office, like Von Moltke, and only directs the manœuvres by telegraph."

"To be truly happy is a question of how we begin, and not of how we end, of what we want, and not of what we have."

"An aspiration is a joy forever, a possession as solid as a landed estate, a fortune which we can never exhaust and which gives us year by year a revenue of pleasurable activity."

"There is indeed one element in human destiny that not blindness itself can controvert : whatever else we are intended to do, we are not intended to succeed ; failure is the fate allotted."

So Stevenson, the cheerfulest man of our time, turns out to be a pessimist after all ; and these sentences, each taken from a different one of his works, represent fairly his romantic, yet pessimistic, creed. For his creed has nothing to do at all with a smug optimism. The assertion of the necessity of strug-

gle, the denial that success is a valid object—there it is, consistent and paradoxical.

Would you hear Stevenson's description of success? It is particularly interesting because it comes just before that sentence about failure being the fate allotted.

"To be honest, to be kind—to earn a little and to spend a little less, to make upon the whole a family happier for his presence, to renounce when that shall be necessary and not be embittered, to keep a few friends, but these without capitulation—above all, on the same grim condition, to keep friends with himself—here is a task for all that a man has of fortitude and delicacy. He has an ambitious soul who would ask more; he has a hopeful spirit who should look in such an enterprise to be successful."

We take this as Stevenson's description of success. It is really his description of failure. It is, he says, the best we can do, for we are intended to fail. The romanticist always fails. His great plans vanish and all that remains for self-congratulation out of the storm and stress is his humanity, his culture. Beware of material success. Beware also of sheer intellectualism, that it does not leave us high and dry without the human touch, without the little local record behind us.

But while failure is the fate allotted, failure in anything great, or even in anything small that has required our finest effort, is not just failure. It is

romance, which is the greatest thing in life. Against the satisfactions of mediocrity, of material success that constructs no further vision, Stevenson directs a withering satire. On the other hand, toward the dreamer like Will, even though he lives solely to cherish his dreams, Stevenson is more indulgent. For such a man is a teacher not without wisdom and not without charm. But the true life is that of the follower of romance—a far goal, a long effort, a life requiring infinite pride, patience, and humbleness. And meanwhile, knowing that the goal is never to be attained, the follower of romance sees also that he must be governed by the rule of daily life: "To be honest, to be kind," to give his time to founding the efforts of other men who will some day go further than he. For it is only thus that one honestly joins himself to posterity.

Stevenson's tomb on the summit of Vaea Mountain looks far across the waters of the Pacific. It is a place from which to contemplate the world, a remote and isolated place peculiarly fitting for the last repose of a great adventurer. But it is not a lonely place. For thither are directed the thoughts of a million friends whom his adventures have made for him. He came to this distant grave bearing with him the love of more fellow men than perhaps has ever been the fortune of a writer, and that, because his life was a superbly successful effort to enjoy myriad experience among his fellow men without disillusionment. In most untoward circumstances he had found the world good; he left it better. He

had proved his theorem of the livableness of life. This man who was carried to his grave on the shoulders of Samoan chiefs, as if he were a king, had there, at the hands of an alien people, not only the final tribute to a European literary fame, but a most perfect acknowledgment of his citizenship in the world.

## POSTSCRIPT

"In the highlands, in the country places,  
Where the old plain men have rosy faces,  
And the young fair maidens  
Quiet eyes;  
Where essential silence cheers and blesses,  
And for ever in the hill-recesses  
Her more lovely music  
Broods and dies.

"O to mount again where erst I haunted;  
Where the old red hills are bird-enchanted,  
And the low green meadows  
Bright with sward;  
And when even dies, the million-tinted,  
And the night has come, and planets glinted,  
Lo! the valley hollow,  
Lamp-bestarred.

"O to dream, O to awake and wander  
There, and with delight to take and render,  
Through the trance of silence,  
Quiet breath;  
Lo! for there, among the flowers and grasses,  
Only the mightier movement sounds and passes;  
Only winds and rivers,  
Life and death."

**PASSAGES FROM STEVENSON'S  
WORKS**



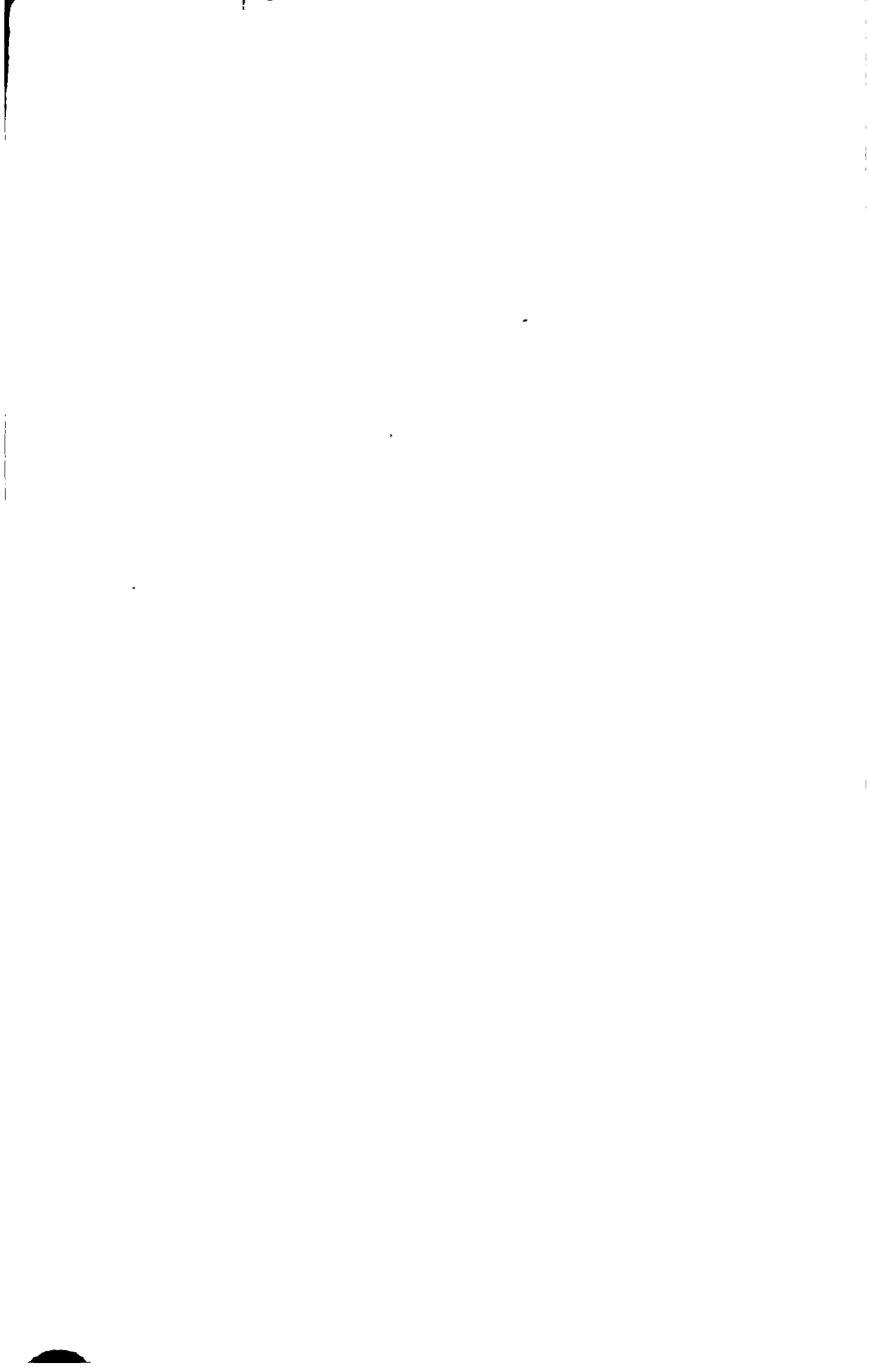


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